

Testimony before the House Education Committee

HB-2345

By

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Chairman Highland, Vice Chairman Lunn, Ranking Minority Member Winn:

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony in opposition to HB-2345 which, if passed, would restrict school board membership.

Let me begin by saying that in the past, conflict of interest rules were used for the most part, to prevent individuals from obtaining financial advantage due to relationships with elected or appointed officials.

It is my personal belief that no one involved in trying to improve, or for that matter, preserve, public education in the State of Kansas is doing so for financial reasons. Therefore, this bill is unnecessary.

It is also my belief that this bill is an attempt to deflect or even silence criticism of the Kansas Legislature as a whole, and individual members in particular. Such criticism is a vital part of the democratic process. As a school board member and township officer I have personal experience with such criticism and still believe it is necessary for good governance.

As you know, Section 1 (c) (3) (A), (C), and (D) would disqualify many small business owners and family members of school employees, teachers and even people living in the same house as school employees or teachers from serving as board members.

Because of these restrictions this bill, if passed, would make it even more difficult to find individuals willing to run for positions on boards of education than it is today, especially in rural areas.

Please do not support this legislation. It appears to be an attempt to stifle valid criticism at a time when we should be trying to expand the debate. It focuses on individuals and classes of individuals who are involved with and concerned about public education in Kansas. And, because of its very narrow focus it just looks mean spirited.

If such legislation was proposed for elected officials at all levels of government in the State of Kansas I would be willing to reconsider my position.