

Date: March 5, 2015
House Committee on Education
Attn: Representative Ron Highland and Committee Members
Testimony in opposition of HB 2345

I am writing today as a current school board member of USD 308 in Hutchinson to voice my opposition to HB 2345.

In addition to serving on the school board, I am the office manager at Dillon Nature Center in Hutchinson. Because USD 308 contracts with the nature center for environmental education field trips, if this bill were in effect, I would not be allowed to serve on the board. I will not argue that in rare instances, my position at the nature center creates a conflict of interest for me as a board member. However, protection of the interests of patrons and the district already exists. When our board needs to discuss and vote on whether the district will contract with the nature center for field trips, I recuse myself. We, as a board, err on the side of caution in instances such as these.

Currently, our board has several intelligent and dedicated public servants who would not be able to serve if HB 2345 passes. Even in a medium-sized community such as ours, it is difficult to find interested candidates who do not have a relative working for the district or have some sort of connection to the district through the exchange of goods or services. Our neighboring district, drawing from an even smaller community base, would lose six of its current seven members due to the proposed legislation. Good and faithful public servants are already hard to find in small Kansas communities.

Please do not chip away at the existing opportunity for local taxpayers to elect their own local leadership. They will certainly continue to seek candidates who have qualifications they view as valuable and will rely on their first-hand knowledge of candidates' level of integrity as they cast their votes. Please trust your fellow citizens and the protection system which is already in place.

I strongly urge the committee to oppose HB 2345.

Thank you for reading and thank you for serving.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sarah J. Blake". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Submitted by: Sarah J. Blake

Date: 3-3-15 (written for hearing on 3-5-15)