

Dear Esteemed Legislators,

On behalf of the Shawnee Mission Board of Education, I would like to submit our strong opposition regarding the moving of local elections to the fall of uneven years. We appreciate and adamantly agree with the current discussion about keeping it a non-partisan election and away from the even year fall state and federal partisan elections. Political affiliation and partisan platforms have no place in the work of a school board member. The focus of every school board and school board member should be doing solely what is in the best interest of the children in their school district.

We understand that the basis of this proposed shift is to improve voter turnout. Voter turnout in any election could certainly be better, and the goal is to have a broad participation in this process. Holding a primary in early August, when vacations are at their highest, cannot be an optimal time for voter turnout at the polls. A March primary at least finds most voters at home. Though November is noted for major partisan elections, April is an expected time for local issues to be addressed and local city, county and school board candidates to be voted into office.

In Shawnee Mission, we have just completed an election at a very unusual time of year – this past January. Through a mail-in ballot going to the home of every registered voter in Shawnee Mission we secured a 30% voter ballot return! This percentage of voter participation is higher than any poll election we have had in recent memory. With this process, voters have the time from when they receive their ballot until the mail-in deadline to seek further knowledge about the issues and the candidates. They can then make an informed vote from the comfort of their home, so getting to a polling station or weather is never an issue. The reason we utilized a January mail-in ballot for our school election issues, was that it was the process that was mandated by our legislators. It would seem that in 2014 legislators believed it was the best voting process to use. The ballot return-rate we enjoyed in January would substantiate that belief. If indeed the goal of this bill is to raise voter turnout, I cannot understand how changing to a mail-in ballot cannot be the obvious choice. This being said, there is no reason to move local elections from their usual and expected timeframe of April to the unusual time of November. With our fiscal year beginning July 1, an April election of new school board members and seating them at that time makes the most sense by far. If this move to November is a step in the direction of making local elections partisan and moving to even years, we vehemently oppose this first step.

Thank you for your service to our state and your time away from your family and careers. We appreciate that you give your electorate a chance to be heard on issues we consider vitally important. We ask you to very thoughtfully reconsider this issue by leaving spring local elections as they currently stand – in April, non-partisan and in odd numbered years. Thank you for your consideration on this issue.

Deb Zila
President, Shawnee Mission Board of Education

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March 11, 2015

House Committee on Elections

Testimony in Opposition to Substitute for Senate Bill 171

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