

Senate Ethics and Elections Committee
SB 171 - Elections

By

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Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

I am concerned about **SB 171**. This bill would make unnecessary changes in election laws for local board members. As a local patron and elected school board member, I am opposed the changes this bill would create for the following reasons.

First, this bill seeks to move the election date for all local elections from April to November. While this may be preferable to a position where constituents are choosing a Representative or Senator based on a political party; this is not preferable as we strive to be non-partisan when making decisions as to what is best for our students. I am most proud of the work we do as *volunteers* within our own communities. I would hate to see this grassroots form of government, which is working now, be clouded by partisan politics. That is *not* the intended role of a school board member.

Second, the current system allows the school board terms to coincide with the school and fiscal year. New board members are elected in April and take office in July. This allows for 3 months of orientation and for the new board member to become acquainted with sitting board members, current issues and the local board's procedures and budgets. I personally used that time to become familiar with the issues our board would be facing in the new school year. I can only speculate that electing a board member, or four (4), in November and asking them to evaluate a Superintendent or support a budget where they were not a party to the planning would only create strained relationships for the board. Further, our district utilizes the IBB process for teacher/staff negotiations. We begin that process in August and bringing a 4 new board members on 6 months into that process could be catastrophic to our non confrontational process.

Third, consolidation of elections in November would most certainly add to the length of our ballots. This alone would be overwhelming to patrons and create a scenario where the "lesser" races would be over looked at the end of a multi page ballot. This most assuredly would create unnecessary competition with larger races. Our local issues would be overshadowed by national and state races. Further, the amount of political ads and postcards would add to voter confusion with regard to local races. I know I, as a local candidate, could not compete with the advertising needed to be heard during that election cycle.

Lastly, this change would affect any government/military personnel who might choose to run for office and participate positively in their local forms of government. I believe the law states, "if a state or local officer or employee's salary is paid completely, directly or indirectly, by loans or grants made by the U.S. or a Federal agency, he or she cannot be a candidate for partisan political office." While we currently have no one fitting this category on our board, we have in the past. This change would have kept him from running for the board and making an impact on our students in USD 458 and his own community.

I am an elected official in my local area, just as you are. I hope that over my 12 years in office, I have represented patrons and constituents well on issues that affect us locally. I had the opportunity to attend the hearing with Senator Holmes a couple of weeks ago. What I took away from that meeting was not a positive feeling. I believe when he stated that he "wanted to leave the emotion out of this process", he has forgotten that this issue is very personal and emotional to those of us at the local level. I personally am tired of fighting the same battles year after year. I ask that you thoughtfully consider your vote and keep local control local. The current system is working. There is no need to "fix what isn't broken".

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Dayna Miller

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