

Senate Bill 171- Local Elections

Public Hearing and Testimony

Feb. 11, 2015

Good morning, my name is Gina McGowan, and I am running for my 3rd term as a school board member for the Ellsworth/Kanopolis/Geneseo school district. I also serve as the Region 7 Vice President for the Kansas Association of School Boards. I am currently lucky enough to be a stay-at-home mom and full-time volunteer for a variety of activities.....most impacting children's lives!! I have a degree in Elementary education and Early Childhood Special Education, and taught for 4 years in Quinter as an EC special education teacher.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. As a KASB Board of Directors member, I was given the opportunity while we were in Topeka a few weeks ago, to listen in on the joint hearing for this bill. It was stated by Senator Holmes, that "we need to take the emotion out of this." I know that emotions speak loudly, but as a school board member, I believe that it's emotion and passion for children that make me an excellent board member. As a registered Republican, I don't make decisions at school board meetings based on my parties' beliefs, nor do I even know how most of my fellow board members are registered. We don't make Democratic/Republican decisions, we make "What's best for kids" decisions!

As a regional vice president for KASB and active community member, I too have taken the time to do some polling and research. As an elected official myself, (and might I remind you, one who receives no payment for this elected office), I take the time to truly listen to my constituents and what they want for our kids and communities. I have taken the time to talk with many of our community leaders such as the county elections clerk, city council members, and other school board members from across the state. I also created my own little facebook poll and asked people if they voted in only certain elections or all elections, and if it mattered who was on the ballot or what party they were affiliated with. EVERYONE that I heard back from said that they vote in ALL

elections, whether national, state, or local. Some of them even went as far as to say they are pretty conservative Republicans, but they don't always vote a straight ticket.....they pointed out that they especially don't care which party people are affiliated with when it comes to school board elections. "We vote for the people that we know will do what's best for our teachers, schools, and kids!" I have heard from NO ONE, except a few of you on the Ethics and Elections committee, who think that moving local elections is a good idea. I've been talking with a variety of people about this for more than a year, and still only hear opposition to this bill.

My personal, biggest opposition to this bill is the fact that school board members would have to be on the bottom of a ballot in November and begin serving in the middle of the school year. I know there has been some talk of when they would take office after a November election. Does it make sense to run and start serving 8 months later? In a smaller town, that could cause problems with people knowing who they should really be talking to about school issues. Sadly, it makes even less sense to be on the ballot in November and take office in January! This is in the middle of the school year!! It makes it hard to know about the finances and activities that have taken place during the first semester. We currently also begin teacher negotiations in February, which would be tough to jump into. In January, we evaluate the superintendent! Is it fair to the superintendent to possibly have 4 new board members evaluating him after working with him for a week?? I don't think any of us would like to be evaluated after just a few days of our boss knowing us!

If our school building were needed as a polling site, it's not just as easy as it seems to say "have an inservice day!" That's possibly 2 more days of instruction that our kids will be missing out on! I also see where you are talking about raising the filing fee to \$20. Again, as one of the only groups of elected officials who get no pay for our service, even the \$5 fee seems odd. Sometimes in our communities, we have a hard enough time finding good people to run for school board, who are running for the right reasons! To ask them to pay even more to file, may turn even more away!!

I pray that you truly begin to listen to the people who are in these roles and know best for their local communities!! I'm an elected official, just like you! I know what it's like to have to make tough decisions! After a failed bond issue attempt a few years ago, we had to really listen to the people of the community and what they wanted and how it would affect them!! We tweaked it some and tried again.....only to fail again, probably because of some voter turnout and some things people still didn't agree with. After truly taking the time to hold meetings and LISTEN to what people were wanting and hearing their stories, we passed our bond issue on the 3rd try. Do I still think we NEED an extra practice gym? Darn right I do.....but that's NOT what the majority of the voters were telling us that they wanted, so I had to LISTEN and make some changes to support what my constituents were asking for! PLEASE put aside political parties and listen to those of us who are living the life of a local board member!!! **It's always best to listen to those who are directly affected and know best how it will affect their communities!** We have some great people serving on school boards and making decisions for our kids!! It's time to stand up for public schools!! Our kids deserve a great, funded, education.....please don't mess with the elections of those who truly care about them and are fighting so hard to give them what they deserve!

If it's truly voter turnout that you are worried about, I'd ask you to try some other options before moving election dates. Mail in ballot results are much higher, and should be tried before making all of these other changes that the majority of your constituents are opposed to! Many resolutions were passed last night at school board meetings, opposing this bill. PLEASE LISTEN!

Thank you for your time!!

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