

Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections, February 11, 2015

In opposition to
SB 171-Elections; municipalities and special districts; spring to fall; other changes.

**By Amy Martin, School Board member Olathe USD 233
Region 15 Vice President KASB
President Elect Designee KASB**

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 171. While my testimony is in alignment with the position of both my local board and the state association on which I serve, I am writing today to share my own experience of local elections and opinion of these changes.

School board members, by and large, are not political people. We're volunteers. We give our time because we have a stake in our schools and the role they play in our communities. Every school board member I've talked to in my KASB activities across the state agrees that finding ways to increase community participation in local governance is important. However, those same board members, with the sole exception of one member of my own board, feel that the legislature should be looking at measures that don't disrupt the current system.

Locally elected officials know the value of, and are concerned about, maintaining local control as specified in our state constitution. I think you are, too.

The current system of non-partisan spring elections does a good job of assuring that local government is in alignment with the desires of the community and holds local leaders accountable to their community. People vote when they have a reason to vote. You can see evidence of this in the spike in the 2005 spring election turnout when the marriage amendment was on the ballot. In my county the turnout was almost three times that of the previous and following spring elections. If a board is not doing the work that the community wants, if local taxation is out of line with the community's expectation, or if some issue has the attention of voters they will show up to vote us out. That, to me, is the definition of accountability and local control.

Consolidating elections crowds the airwaves and creates a barrier to voters having access to the information they need to make an informed vote on local races. Not just school board candidates, but also concerned groups of citizens wanting to raise awareness of an issue on their board, would have a harder time being heard by voters. Competition with all of the larger races would be a serious obstacle to getting information into voters' hands. My home received 91 pieces of direct mail during the 2014 fall election. The fundraising required to compete with that much noise would discourage many good people from considering service in local government.

I applaud your efforts to increase voter participation in local governance, however I feel strongly that the measures proposed in this bill actually do a disservice to voters. Thank you.

