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Great students. Great teachers. Great leaders. Great citizens.

Ken Willard, State Board of Education Testimony on HB 2345

Committee on Judiciary

Members of the judiciary committee, it is my pleasure to offer some observations regarding the intent and potential effects of HB 2345.

While the intent of whomever introduced this bill is surely to eliminate and prohibit any real conflict of interest that could corrupt decisions made by elected school board members and elected state board of education members, it is my view that the ripple effect of passage of this bill in its present form could also dramatically limit the pool of qualified and available candidates.

In many areas of our state, local school districts, in particular, often have a difficult time finding candidates willing and able to run for local school boards. As you know, serving on a local school board is completely voluntary, and pays nothing. This bill has the potential of making that problem an even worse.

In a recent visit to a school district in my state board district, I was told that this measure would have eliminated all but one of their board members, and would have eliminated two of the superintendent's siblings from school board service on their local school boards in other parts of the state. And, it should be noted that this school board has clear conflict of interest policies and procedures in place that ensure that any conflicts that may arise are properly managed and eliminated.

Interestingly, this bill addresses only people who are candidates or members of local school boards and the state board of education, but does not apply to any other elected position in the state, whether city, township, county or state government. Good ethics policy should be applicable to public servants in all areas of government, not just education related public service.

If the objective is to prevent conflicts of interest for those serving on local school boards and the state board of education, it would seem the best measure to take would be to require that all boards adopt conflict of interest avoidance policies, that board members be fully aware of the measures needed to ensure compliance and guard against conflicts of interest, and that those policies be made easily available to voting citizens and patrons, thereby making them ultimately accountable to the voters of their districts.

I do know that many school boards do have strict conflict of interest policies in place, and I think all districts should.

2015 Special Committee on Ethics,
Elections and Local Government
November 20, 2015
Attachment 10

Finally, one reason many people are reluctant to commit to service on a school board is that they don't feel they are well enough informed about the complex issues dealt with by the boards. People who have some understanding of education issues are usually the people who step up.

Considering that public education is probably the largest employer in the state of Kansas, and that this bill would preclude not only those people, but their spouses and siblings, or even a boarder in their home, from serving anywhere in the state, this bill seems ill-advised and counterproductive, if not unconstitutional.

For the reasons stated above, I would encourage this committee to not report favorably on this bill. I believe the objective of preventing clear conflicts of interest from corrupting the decision making of local and state boards of education, can be better be achieved by other measures.

Respectfully,

Ken Willard

State Board of Education, District 7