

House Education Committee

HB 2345 – A bill regarding school board members and conflicts of interest.

Testimony in Opposition

March 3, 2015

Dear House Education Committee Members,

I am submitting written testimony in opposition of **HB 2345**, as I believe it overly restricts who is able to run and serve on our local school boards. The end result will be to exclude some very high quality individuals who have a strong desire to serve their local communities in a much needed position that is sometimes not highly sought after.

I am a current school board member. But because my wife and I both work for firms who do consulting work in our own school district as well as other surrounding districts, I would be excluded from running again after July 1, 2015. Board members residing in a home where an employee of a school district or Department of Education also resides, or having a spouse, sibling, or parent who is employed by a school district or Department of Education would also be excluded. And it is my understanding that this is even if the school district in question is not the same district where the board member serves.

In my opinion, potential conflicts of interest are adequately dealt with through existing laws. School board members are already prohibited by state law from being an employee of or receiving compensation from their district. Current state law also prohibits school board members from participating in making contracts between their business and the school board on which they serve. In my own case, I would exclude myself from any decisions (contracts or otherwise) involving the firms that I and my wife work for. A board member can be forced to forfeit their office for a violation of this act (see KSA 75-4304(e)) and violations of the act could also be a misdemeanor (see KSA 75-4306.).

In addition, it is my understanding that local districts can supplement these laws as they see fit. For example, some districts have existing policies related to nepotism. And outside the restrictions of the existing laws in place, voters should have the opportunity to decide for themselves whether or not a candidate is trustworthy enough to serve on their local school board. HB 2345 would take away this aspect of local control from our communities.

I strongly encourage you to vote no on HB 2345.

Sincerely,

Marcel Harmon, PhD, PE, LEED AP O+M
School Board Member, USD #497
Lawrence, KS