

**SB 427 Proponent Testimony in person**  
**School Board transparency and free speech**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Ward Cassidy, Executive Director**  
**March 13, 2024**



Madam Chair and Committee Members,

I am here to testify in support of SB 427. The passage of this bill would be a positive step in allowing a more vested public and dedicated board members to effectively participate in improving education in their district.

The Kansas School Board Resource Center is a nonprofit organization that provides training, model policy, and governance guidance to school board members. The proposed changes in SB 427 are driven by requests from many board members.

We hear concerns from school board members, saying they don't receive emails that go through their district offices. Some districts are apparently not forwarding all emails. Board members want their constituents to be able to reach out to them directly via email.

The comments about adding agenda items to board meeting discussions mainly deal with issues that are raised by constituents or need to be addressed with some urgency. An example would be a safety concern that needs immediate attention. A school board member should not be prohibited from discussing an issue publicly because the board president or other board members don't want to have the conversation.

Another common complaint from board members is that not being allowed to ask and answer questions during open meetings limits their effectiveness as a board member. Many complain that their superintendent tells them they cannot comment legally during these sessions, which is not true.

Several school board members have asked why they are not allowed access to school property or to visit with teachers and administrators in those buildings. They say they occasionally receive concerns from staff members that necessitate unannounced visits to a school to observe situations for themselves.

Also, allowing school districts to pay dues to any nonprofit rather than just KASB is not for KSBRC because we do not and will not charge fees. The change is to allow districts to join any nonprofit that provides the listed services rather than only KASB.

School board members should not be limited in their duties by people or organizations that want to control the narrative of public education. One-third of students are below grade level, which has worsened over the years. That cannot change if board members are restricted in doing their job.

SB 427 will allow dedicated school board members to be more involved and effective. We appreciate this opportunity and encourage you to approve the bill.