

HB 2382 School Board Member Free Speech and Transparency Act
Proponent Testimony – in person
House K-12 Budget Committee
February 20, 2023

Hello, my name is Amy Cawvey and I am a sitting school board member and Vice President at Lansing USD 469. Speaking as an individual and not on behalf of the board, I fully place my support behind house bill 2382.

School board members need to provide transparency to their constituents which includes electronic communications with staff, administrators. I fully support these items being subject to KORA. The only portion. The response to KORA requests need to be handled in a timely matter. I have seen these requests prolonged by administrators and have also seen them not handled correctly. This is a crucial step during the KORA process. I would suggest amending in this bill is regarding communication from private citizens, for example parents, to board members. This is often done in confidence and they do not consent to their correspondence being made public. Currently under KORA this exemption is provided. Parents would not feel comfortable contacting their elected board members without it.

Section 1(b)(2) – I suggest adding this language to exempt communications between a board member and a patron or staff member: *This section shall apply to communications between a board member and other board members and district staff, but not to communications between a single board member and a patron or district staff member.*

I fully support an individual board member being allowed to add items to the meeting agenda. We can not fully represent our constituents and be a voice for them without this. Currently the Board President and superintendent set the agenda, but board president is a parliamentary position to preside over meetings and the superintendent is not an elected official. By denying an individual board member the right to have items added to agenda is denying their ability to fully represent their constituents.

I also support mandating districts to allow public speak. We have done this successfully in Lansing with our Parents Bill of Rights. The public should always maintain this right, however, I also support board members being able to engage with patrons during or after public speak. Sometimes a clarification is all that is needed by board members on policy, other times things have been said that are outright slander. We need to be able to provide answers and during meetings to questions and also correct the record when needed.

I am very proud of our students, staff and district but like other districts our achievement scores have been declining. In math and ELA, we have more students below grade level now than in 2015 and proficiency levels are lower. That is going in the wrong direction. Board members need to be transparent with the public and also retain the ability to bring about policies to promote much needed changes in education. This bill will support that and empower individual school board members to advocate for their constituents.

Thank you