

My name is Kirsten Workman and I'm a school board member from Lansing, KS. The views I express are my own and do not represent those of the local school board. I'm here to urge you to recognize the importance of allowing **individual school board members to join professional organizations of their choosing, independent of district-level affiliation, and using equivalent district funds** where needed.

This distinction, that of allowing individual choice of affiliation, matters. A board of education's membership in an organization can carry financial, political, and advocacy implications that not all voters (and communities) support. Individual membership in professional organizations, by contrast, allows locally elected board members to pursue training, legal knowledge, and governance resources **without committing the board of education as a whole—and subsequently, taxpayer dollars—to a particular organization's positions.**

Individual participation also promotes **independence and accountability.** Many statewide organizations engage in legislative advocacy. While that may be valuable to some, their positions do not always align with the views of every school district or voter, and which many, in fact, strongly oppose. Allowing individual board members to engage with a range of organizations ensures no single organization becomes the default or dominant voice shaping our local decisions.

Kansas school districts differ widely in size, needs, and values. Giving elected board members access to multiple perspectives reduces groupthink and supports **locally informed decision-making**, which is necessary to *effective governance.*

Finally, individual membership respects **local control.** School board members are elected by their communities, *not* associations, to provide **governmental oversight** for the local school district. Preserving board members' ability to seek independent professional development strengthens boards without imposing uniformity of thought and decision-making or unnecessary cost.

Here is an example I'd like to leave you with which I hope illustrates the influence a professional organization has on local government:

Last month, our board contracted with our affiliated school board association for training on boardsmanship and local board operations. I expected a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of our current governance model to clarify our legally-defined role and improve collaboration. Instead, the training focused heavily on prescriptive “should’s” for board member behavior and projecting public unity. It framed independent board member action as harmful to public education and to be honest, felt a lot like behavior modification.

We were told to quote, “work out differences of opinion on action items outside open meetings whenever possible,” to use the superintendent as an intermediary for board communication in order to avoid serial meetings while doing so, and, quote, “Don’t give the community something to talk about.” As a result, our board is now considering operating procedures that limit individual members’ ability to place items on the agenda, restrict board member comment during meetings, and require all policy changes be presented by the superintendent.

I don't know about you, but I want my community talking about local government. Yet the organization our board contracts with promotes a leadership philosophy that fundamentally conflicts with what my constituents and the law expect. As an elected official, I want to speak in my own voice on behalf of my constituents, not have my message translated or watered down by anyone, and I don't want that for those who disagree with me, either.

Like most school board members, I am skilled and motivated to bring my talents to serve our community's children. However, I need professional development and legal guidance to help me fulfill my role, not training that encourages me to delegate my judgment.

Promoting the right of individual school board members to join professional organizations of their choice supports fiscal responsibility, informed governance, and accountability to *local* voters. Please pass HB 2510.

Thank you for your time and consideration.