

Written Testimony in Opposition to Proposed Amendments to House Bill 2451
Submitted by: Dr. Dawn M. Johnson, Superintendent, USD 308 Hutchinson Public Schools
Before the House Committee on Elections

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding House Bill 2451. I am providing written testimony in respectful opposition to the proposed amendments that would further restrict how school districts and municipalities communicate information to the public about ballot questions, including school bond elections.

As a public-school superintendent, I fully support the longstanding and appropriate prohibition on using public resources to advocate for or against candidates or ballot measures. That boundary is clear and necessary. However, the proposed language in HB 2451 goes beyond preventing advocacy and instead significantly limits a school district's ability to inform taxpayers about ballot questions that directly affect them, including the financial impact of school bonds on property taxes, the scope of proposed projects, and the educational needs being addressed.

Public school districts have a responsibility to operate transparently. When a bond election is proposed, the public expects and deserves access to accurate and timely information. Under the proposed amendments, districts would be prohibited from using common and modern communication tools (district websites, social media, email, and other mass communication platforms) to provide that information, even in an educational manner. This restriction would have a chilling effect on transparency and would leave voters less informed, not more protected.

The language prohibiting "directed mass communications," including social media and mailers, creates an untenable standard in today's communication environment. These platforms are no longer optional tools; they are the primary means by which public institutions communicate with their communities. Preventing their use for bond information disproportionately harms districts' ability to reach working families, rural residents, seniors, and individuals who rely on digital communication for access to public information. Ironically, the result is reduced voter understanding and increased reliance on third-party messaging that may be incomplete, misleading, and often inaccurate.

Additionally, the proposed amendments risk conflating education with advocacy. Providing factual explanations of a bond proposal, such as project lists, timelines, costs, and tax implications, is not campaigning; it is good governance. School districts are uniquely positioned to explain the technical and educational implications of these measures. Restricting that communication undermines informed consent by voters and weakens public trust.

I respectfully urge the committee to reconsider these amendments and preserve the ability of school districts and municipalities to communicate bond information to the public regarding ballot questions. Transparency, education, and informed decision-making are cornerstones of a healthy democratic process. House Bill 2451, as amended, moves us away from those principles rather than strengthening them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Dawn M. Johnson, Ed.D.
Superintendent
USD 308 Hutchinson Public Schools