

Amber Douglas
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January 21, 2026

Chairman and Members of the Committee
Kansas House Elections Committee
Kansas State Capitol
Topeka, Kansas

Re: Written Testimony in Support of HB2451

Chairman, Vice-Chairman Waggoner, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Amber Douglas. I am a parent, taxpayer, and resident of Wellington, Kansas. I am submitting this written testimony in support of HB2451 because I personally experienced what happens when a school district uses public resources to push a bond and there is no clear law or agency willing or able to stop it.

This is not theoretical. I have everything documented and saved, including dates, names, communications, videos, posts, and responses from state agencies.

What My School District Did

In 2025, Wellington USD 353 placed a school bond on the November ballot. Between August and October 2025, the district went beyond neutral information and into advocacy using public resources.

Examples include:

A district-produced promotional video posted on the official "Wellington KS Public Schools" Facebook page on September 24, 2025. In this video, the Board President stated, "If we don't reinvest in our school district, we might as well close this town down." A separate video which included a student encouraging viewers to "vote yes" was also posted on their official Facebook page. That student was filmed inside Wellington High School, during school hours, and the video was posted during school hours which means the district used taxpayer-funded buildings, staff time, and students to promote a ballot issue.

Flyers and large poster boards inside school buildings were labeled "Efficient, Reliable, and Essential." These are not neutral descriptors. They are persuasive value-based words. "Efficient" implies the district is being smart and responsible with money. "Reliable" suggests trustworthiness and security. "Essential" implies that a "yes" vote is necessary or morally required. Together, those words are designed to influence emotions and judgment, not simply provide facts. These materials were displayed in common areas accessible to students, staff, and the public.

District employees posted pro-bond messages during school hours.

On October 29, 2025, Sumner NewsCow published a *district-sponsored* article titled, "Wellington USD 353 Projects the Financial Impacts of \$22.5 Million Bond Proposal." The article used persuasive language like "critical," "significant state aid," and warned of a "greater financial burden if delayed."

All of this was funded, produced, or distributed using taxpayer resources.

What I Tried to Do About It

I did what citizens are supposed to do.

On September 3, 2025, I contacted Superintendent Adam Hatfield and asked that school employees refrain from posting advocacy content during work hours. He acknowledged my concern.

On September 25, 2025, I filed a formal complaint with the Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission (now the Kansas Public Disclosure Commission), naming the board president, superintendent, official district Facebook page, videos, flyers, and posters.

On September 30, 2025, the Commission replied that even if everything I alleged was true, they had no authority or jurisdiction to act because Kansas law does not clearly prohibit public advocacy for bond issues. Their investigator explained that the statutes clearly cover candidates, but not ballot questions, and that no agency has authority to enforce this when it comes to bonds.

On October 30, 2025, I wrote to Representative Paul Waggoner explaining that Kansas citizens have no enforcement mechanism when districts use public resources to push bonds.

On November 4, 2025, I filed a complaint with the Kansas Attorney General outlining the same facts: videos, student advocacy, posters, staff time, district social media, and sponsored media articles. I asked the Attorney General's office to review whether public resources were being misused and to clarify the law.

The reality I learned is simple. You can document it, complain, cite statutes, but no one has clear authority to stop it.

Why HB2451 Matters

My experience proves there is a real gap in Kansas law. Right now, school districts can use public resources to push bonds. Citizens can complain but agencies will say, "We don't have jurisdiction", therefore, voters are left without protection.

HB2451 does something simple and necessary. It makes it clear that public officers and employees cannot use public assets, money, staff time, facilities, or official communication channels to advocate for or against ballot questions, *including* school bonds.

This does not silence anyone and does not prevent information. Districts can still explain what a bond is, what it would fund, what it would cost, and when the vote is. They just cannot tell people how to vote using taxpayer resources.

Why This Is Important

This is not about whether a bond is good or bad and solely about fairness. When government uses public resources to advocate, it creates an uneven playing field where one side has taxpayer money, official branding, staff time, and access to students and families yet and the other side has nothing but personal time and personal money. That is not a fair election nor is it a neutral government. That is not what public trust looks like. I did everything the system tells citizens to do and the system told me, "There is no rule. There is no referee." *HB2451 gives Kansas that referee.*

Closing

I support HB2451 because *I lived through* exactly why it is needed, I proved the enforcement gap exists, I tried every legal avenue available, and I was told (by the state itself) that no one could act.

This bill protects taxpayers, voters, and students from being used as political tools by publicly funded institutions.

Thank you for your time and for working to close this gap in Kansas law.

Respectfully submitted,

Signed by:

Amber Douglas 1/21/2026

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Amber Douglas

Wellington, Kansas