

Testimony to the Legislative House Education Committee in Opposition to HB 2180

Madam Chairman Roers and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you today. My name is Cameron Wahlstrom and I am the President of the Alexander Public School Board. I am providing testimony in strong opposition to HB 2180.

As a lifelong member of the Alexander community, I am deeply committed to ensuring the success of our schools and the well-being of our students and staff. I grew up here, and I actively participate in school events, from cheering at games to supporting fundraisers. I am accessible to our community members—I answer emails, return phone calls, and meet face-to-face with constituents to hear their concerns. When issues arise, I host public forums to provide additional opportunities for dialogue and collaboration.

Protocols Are in Place for Public Engagement

Our school district has established clear and accessible protocols for public engagement. Community members who wish to address the board may contact me or the superintendent in advance to be placed on the agenda. This process ensures that all voices can be heard in an organized and fair manner. If someone prefers not to use the formal agenda process, they can reach out to me directly—I always take the time to explain the protocol, listen to their concerns, and address their issues appropriately.

The Risks of Unrestricted Public Comment

HB 2180 would fundamentally undermine the structure and purpose of school board meetings. These are business meetings, and like any effective business meeting, they require order and structure to address the agenda and make sound decisions. Allowing unrestricted public comment on any topic at these meetings would create chaos, disrupt the flow of necessary discussions, and distract from the business at hand.

Furthermore, as a school board, we are often tasked with making decisions that require impartiality, particularly regarding personnel and student matters. As board president, I can inform the public that such topics are off-limits for discussion during meetings. However, that does not guarantee compliance. If someone chooses to ignore this directive and speaks about personnel or students, the damage is done. Once something is said, it cannot be taken back. This compromises the impartiality of the board members, jeopardizes due process, and exposes the district to legal challenges.

Amplifying Tensions Rather Than Resolving Them

As someone who has navigated countless challenging situations as board president, I know how passionate our community members are about our school. That passion can be a tremendous asset, but it can also create challenges. Without proper structure, public comment periods risk becoming forums for grievances that inflame tensions rather than resolve them. This bill would

give those with personal agendas an avenue to bypass established processes, potentially leading to conflict and division within our communities.

Protecting the Integrity of Business Meetings

Public meetings are not town halls—they are business meetings. Our board is elected to represent the community, to uphold the district's policies, and to make decisions in the best interests of our students and staff. This requires focus, structure, and adherence to an agenda. Allowing open public comment without limitations of the subject undermines the very purpose of these meetings and hampers our ability to serve our schools effectively.

Conclusion

As school board president, I take my role as a representative of the community seriously. I value the input of our constituents and work tirelessly to ensure their concerns are heard. However, HB 2180 threatens to disrupt the effectiveness of school boards, create legal risks, and diminish the ability of our elected officials to govern responsibly.

I urge you to oppose HB 2180 and to protect the integrity of our school board meetings so that we can continue to serve our schools and communities effectively.

Thank you for your time and consideration.