



Michigan Parents for Schools

*Parents working for excellent public schools
—for our children, our communities, and our future.*

25 October 2017

Jennifer Tanau
Board Chair
Janice Lieberman
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Jeannette Jackson
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Carrie Chester
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Angela Wilson
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Executive Director

The Honorable Tim Kelly, Chair
House Committee on Education Reform
N-1198 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Chairman Kelly and members of the Committee,

I write to you today regarding House Joint Resolution M, the proposed amendment to the Michigan Constitution which would eliminate the elected State Board of Education and place the Department of Education directly under the authority of the Governor.

As public school parents, we cherish the principle that our local public schools should be answerable directly to the members of the community they serve. Our State has, since its founding, put force into that principle by ensuring not only that local public schools would be governed by the local community, but that the individuals elected to oversee our schools would be free of competing political and administrative concerns. Unlike some other states, our elected school boards are not simply departments of the municipal government but are coequal with those other municipal entities.

Governance of K-12 public education at the state level has also followed those principles. Every Michigan Constitution since 1850 has entrusted overall authority over public education to an independent, elected, state board of education. While elections to the SBE are partisan, members of the Board are free to focus solely on providing the best education for Michigan children and are not burdened with the competing pressures of the normal legislative process. They are given longer, overlapping terms in order to encourage deeper understanding of educational issues and continuity in policy direction.

Stripping the people of Michigan of the power to choose their own state board of education would be a profound mistake in our view. While we have sometimes been frustrated with the Board's work and stands, we also acknowledge that much of their power and authority has been removed by successive Governors and Legislatures. Rather than ignoring the SBE, MIPFS has strived to increase citizen awareness and involvement in its work, just as we have encouraged parent engagement and involvement with their local school boards.

We urge you and your colleagues to set aside HJR M and instead develop practices and procedures which would allow the elected SBE and the elected Legislature to collaborate in the development of sound educational policy on behalf of Michigan's children.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Steven J. Norton
Executive Director

cc: members of the Committee

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