

Education Committee  
PUBLIC HEARING  
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Room 2B of the LOB

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Remarks re: Senate Bill 1015

As the current chairman of the only fully elected, non-partisan board of education in the state – the Berlin Board of Education – I speak in support of S.B. 1015, which would remove current statutory restrictions that prevent local communities from determining whether or not to have a non-partisan board of education.

Let me be very clear, I am in no way arguing or advocating that communities must or even should move from partisan to non-partisan boards of education. But I am strongly supportive of changing the current law so that local communities can have this option available to them.

Berlin has had a non-partisan board of education for two generations. In fact, occasional efforts by some individuals to move back to a partisan board of education have been met with a decidedly cool reception. Having a non-partisan board of education has been beneficial for our community and, I believe, is partly responsible for the success of our school system. Other communities should have the same opportunity that we currently enjoy.

Berlin has a nine-member board of education. Members serve three-year terms, with three of the nine members up for election each year. Individuals who are interested in becoming candidates must collect signatures of 1% of the voters to appear on the ballot. In our community, that amounts to approximately 125 signatures.

Over the past few years, the Berlin Board of Education has had members who are teachers – both public and private, an attorney, a financial advisor, a retired insurance executive, a non-profit executive, an information technology manager, an actuary, a project manager, and even an 18 year old college student. More to the point, for each of these individuals their service on the board of education was their introduction to elected office.

This being open to, and attraction of, civic-minded individuals who would normally avoid party politics or might not be nominated through the party process, is perhaps the primary advantage of a non-partisan board. In a state where there are more non-affiliated voters than Democrats or Republicans, and where communities often struggle to attract talented individuals to government service, we can ill-afford to exclude almost half of registered voters.

Approval of this proposed bill costs the legislature nothing. It is not a mandate – funded or unfunded, it is not an imposed requirement or restriction on local communities; it is simply an opportunity. An opportunity for communities to assert a small measure of self-determination. To decide for themselves whether there are other, more effective means of representation that might better serve their community.

At a time when state and local government are facing unprecedented challenges, when the need and demand for quality public education has never been greater, we can ill-afford to continue to legislate one-size-fits-all solutions for local governments. Passage of this bill is one small step for more self-determination as communities search for better ways to provide a quality education for their children.