



Stillwater

AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Independent School District 834
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Chair Jim Carlson
95 University Avenue West
Minnesota Senate Building, 3221
St. Paul, MN 55115

March 12, 2024

RE: SF 4951 Requirements to fill a vacancy in the office of school board member modified.

Dear Chair Carlson:

Senate File 4951 helps to solve problems related to how school districts manage a board member's resignation.

First, the bill modifies statute so that when a school board member resigns, if the vacancy occurs less than two years prior to the expiration of the term, no special election is required, and the appointee of the board shall serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

I'm writing this letter of support to describe the impact of special elections in the Stillwater Area Public School District

In Stillwater, we have had 5 board members resign since 2020.

Our district, which is a large district area wise, has had two special elections over the last 3 years. In 2021, the district paid Washington County \$48,607 to assist with our special election. In 2023, we paid Washington County \$88,693 to assist with our special election for us. Because there is no designated funding for schools to run elections, this cost comes from the general fund, taking money out of the classroom, and away from our students.

I also want to share what can happen when districts are asked to perform elections that they are not used to.

In the fall of 2023, we ran a special election. Because of the increasing costs of elections, we were asked to run combined precincts by the county in some of our smaller communities due to anticipated lower voter turnout.

A clerical error was made on the part of the district in which community members in one newly combined precinct were not notified of the change by mail by the specified date. The error was not caught by the county. We were made aware of this by local citizens after the required notification date and conducted a mailing before the election.

The district was accused of this error being intentional, and our integrity was damaged, as this precinct covered a community in which the district had previously closed a school.

The district was forced to go into damage control, as this issue was covered by the Pioneer Press and various local media outlets.

If we maintained the process of general elections every two years, we would not have the potential for errors related to combined precincts, or from having to run elections which are clearly not our primary area of focus.

In Stillwater, the costs related to special elections have been twofold: Our last two special elections required the district to spend \$137,300 that could have been spent on students. The clerical error also negatively impacted the reputation of our district, as elections are not our purpose.

Thank you for your consideration of SF 4951.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "mi-funk", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Michael Funk
Superintendent
Stillwater Area Public Schools