



Springfield Board of Education

1359 E. St. Louis St.

Springfield, MO

December 19, 2023

Dear Board of Education Members,

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, political organization that advocates for issues we believe are in the best interests of our democracy. We share your commitment to quality public education and thank you for your service.

Representatives of the League have previously spoken at these meetings and sent letters urging you to adopt a resolution of support for LGBTQ+ students and staff. We are concerned about the Board's reluctance to adopt such a resolution or to correct the district's nondiscrimination policy, recognizing that "sex" and "gender identity" are distinct.

We have recently witnessed your discussions regarding the USDA nondiscrimination guidelines that include gender identity and sexual orientation and are dismayed by your inability to reach unanimity on this consequential guideline.

The League's national policies state that, in order to have an informed citizenry and protect our democracy, "every citizen should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all." We believe that equal opportunity can only be provided in physically and psychologically safe environments, including protections for sexual orientation and gender identity.

Our policies also state that in public education, "no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination." We fear that your failure to adopt nondiscrimination policies that include gender identity and sexual

orientation language, or even to endorse a statement of support for LGBTQ+ students and staff, is a form of administrative discrimination that you should re-examine.

We recognize that human sexuality is a complex issue. We respect that individuals have varying levels of knowledge and comfort with these topics. Regardless of your personal stances, however, we hold you as Board members to a standard of providing the public with accurate information.

Misinformation about gender identity and sexual orientation is being spread at Board meetings and in other venues. We believe that you speak with the authority of your elected offices when making public comments and that you carry a responsibility to reject misinformation. A misuse of this authority by spreading misinformation, whether intentional or inadvertent, is unacceptable for public officials.

We refer you to a resource that League members use to avoid misinformation: stlouisvpc.org/disinformation-learn-more. We attach resources about gender identity and sexual orientation that League members have found useful.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sherry Buchanan, Co-President

Emily Fessler, Co-President

The League of Women Voters of Southwest Missouri

lwvsouthwestmo@gmail.com



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Dear Board of Education Members,

The League of Women Voters of Southwest Missouri has been a long standing supporter of Springfield Public Schools, as we value high-quality education that will inform students today, who are our leaders for tomorrow. Similar to the Board of Education, the League is non-partisan. We are fortunate to work with elected and public officials in much of the work we do.

We value the Board as non-partisan, and that each member was elected on non-partisan principles. However, the League's Observer Corps has been disheartened to see public officials bringing personal bias into Board and district issues that may breach the values, ethics, and codes set forth for you as elected officials. You are seen in the community as a Board member first, and that authority cannot be dismissed. What you say within private spheres is your own, but as soon as you step into the public sphere, whether you are acting in official district business or not, you are tied to your public position and the responsibilities therein.

In 2010, citizens of Springfield called for greater civility in public discourse, which led to the development of The Springfield-Greene County Civility Project by the Good Community Committee. They established the 10 tenets of Civility, which many entities in Springfield have adopted. They include private businesses, public agencies, the Greene County Commissioners and City Council. These tenets are woven into our League's policies and practices. We strongly encourage the Board of Education to become familiar with these tenets, and work to establish a culture of civil discourse.

Civil discourse demands that there be an open and engaged discussion. Nobody has to win or lose; discourse is not a contest. Instead, the goal of discourse is to gain new perspectives and understanding of a particular issue. It can sometimes be much easier to ignore and stigmatize those you do not agree with. Civil discourse provides a chance for people to work together towards something greater.

We are all here because we passionately care for the education of students within the district. We can all agree that our end goal is to educate, inform, and empower students who will one day be making the decisions about our community and district. To this end, we encourage you, as Board

members, as representatives and decision makers of our district, to look towards consensus building through civil discourse.

We urge you to focus on the issues, have an open mind, and know when to walk away from discourse that is not constructive. By taking the time to listen to different perspectives and views, the Board can establish a common goal, and create a clear plan of action that creates equitable, safe, and supportive learning environments for students and faculty. To this end, The League asks for the Board's commitment to set aside personal stances, embrace the community's 10 tenets of Civility, and build consensus.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sherry Buchanan, Co-President

Emily Fessler, Co-President

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