



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF PENNSYLVANIA**

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**Testimony of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania  
Before the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee  
May 4, 2012**

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today concerning Senate Bill 327. I am Sharon Kletzien, off-board education specialist for the League. I am here representing this grassroots nonpartisan organization, committed to good government. As you may know, the League of Women Voters studies issues carefully before reaching consensus. Thus, the League's positions reflect deliberation and discussion of different viewpoints, pros and cons of issues related to good government.

We have a history of supporting effective election legislation and uniform voting procedures including registration by mail and the use of electronic voting devices. We advocate for laws to make it easier for the disabled and the elderly to vote. As part of our commitment to fair and open elections, the League supports the nonpartisan election of school directors as called for in Senate Bill 327. As an interim step to a truly nonpartisan election, we have supported cross-filing of candidates for school board in the past.

There are several reasons for our position advocating nonpartisan election of school directors. First, candidates for school board should have children and their education as their primary concern, not party platforms or politics. Education governance should be nonpartisan with decisions made solely on the basis of what is good for the school district, the children, the parents, and the taxpayers – not on what a political party may have adopted as part of its stance. In the United States, education has always had local governance. Elected school boards should reflect the values and priorities of the local school district – not of a political party's state or national platform.

Second, individuals who want to serve on school boards should have the opportunity and responsibility to make their background and their beliefs and attitudes about education known to the voting public. Party labels can actually detract from the understanding of voters regarding what candidates think about education and the role that they would play on a school board.

Education and children should be the focus for voters' decisions, not what party a candidate belongs to.

Under currently existing legislation, the vetting of candidates has been left to the political parties whose members vote in the primaries for the individuals to represent them in the November municipal elections. If Senate Bill 327 becomes law, we suggest that open forums be held in the fall through which candidates could share their qualifications and ideas about education in a face-to-face venue. At the same time, citizens could enhance voter education as they raise questions and seek clarification as to each candidate's positions.

Third, although the League has supported cross-filing for school board elections in the past, this has been seen as an interim step toward non-partisan school board elections. The requirement that individuals now have to obtain nominating petitions from both parties in order to cross file puts an additional burden on school board candidates. To serve their communities as elected officials, they must run in the primary election and then in the general election in November. This creates a long election season for individuals whose real concern is education, not party politics. We support Senate Bill 327's calling for nonpartisan school board elections as part of the November municipal elections. Having one election with only one required nominating petition will simplify the process. Serving on a school board is a difficult, time-consuming position; getting elected to do so does not need to be.

In sum, party politics should not play a role in school board elections. Voters should be able to determine candidates' ideas and commitment to children and education without party labels. Just as education should not be a political issue, neither should school board elections. One step to encourage this is to have nonpartisan school board elections as called for in Senate Bill 327.

Thank you.