

**TESTIMONY FOR SENATE EDUCATION
TRUSTEE ELECTIONS
SB1103**

Mr. Chair, members of the Committee. For the record, I am Karen Echeverria, Executive Director of the Idaho School Boards Association. I'm here today representing school districts, charter schools, and the Board members who govern them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB1103 related to school trustee elections. We stand in opposition to this legislation for several reasons.

On page one of the bill, the language indicates that school district boundaries should be drawn, to the greatest extent possible, along existing county voting precinct boundaries. As a reminder, the State Board of Education must approve any school district boundary change and all trustee zone changes. After the last census, when school zones were redrawn, the State Board of Education adopted the same general standards as the Idaho Citizen Commission on Reapportionment. Those standards required that no one school district trustee zone shall differ in population by more than 10% from any other trustee zone. Those standards went on to further say that the State Board of Education could reject a school district proposal for the creation of a bizarrely-shaped zones that cannot be justified by geographic/topographic limitation or other considerations. There are also many places in Idaho where school district boundaries do not match with census blocks which are used to determine population. We believe that it would be incredibly difficult to attempt to overlay precinct boundaries with school district boundaries and still have equitable distribution of population in each trustee zone.

In addition, while there may be no fiscal impact to the general fund, there will absolutely be a fiscal impact to school districts. In 2012, the last time school districts rezoned, ISBA assisted them with that process. We hired engineers to assist school districts with redrawing the trustee zones and another firm to review every proposal to assure that it met the standards adopted by the State Board of Education. My review of those records provided a conservative estimate of more than a quarter of a million dollars paid by school districts to complete those rezones. After discussing this bill with our consultants, they indicated that

because of the complexity of the overlay of precincts and zones, redrawing the trustee zones under the requirements outlined in this bill would cost considerably more than what has already been expended.

We are also opposed to moving the date of elections to the general election in November. As you all know, trustees are non-partisan candidates. We cannot support moving those elections from a non-partisan date and ballot to a partisan date and ballot. We believe that trustee elections will get lost on the ballot. Voters will be more concerned about voting for the President, the Governor, Congressmen, and state legislators. Voters will likely not spend the time necessary to really explore and understand the candidates that will be running for these very important positions.

Finally, having trustees take office on January 1 simply does not work with a school schedule. It is possible to have three members of a five member Board be newly elected during any election. Those three new members would be taking office in the middle of a school year. They would have had no input on the continuous improvement plan that has already been implemented. They will have no idea if any of the goals are being met, they won't know what contracts had been let and if they were being overseen, they won't know what administrators have been hired, and they will be asked to support all of those initiatives without having been involved in the development or oversight of any of that work. In addition, one of the first jobs they would be required to complete would be an evaluation of their superintendent. They would be asked to review his or her work on goals without having worked with that person for more than one month.

The bottom line is that having school Board elections in November and having trustees take office in January simply does not work with a school district schedule.

For these reasons, we ask that you hold SB1103 in committee.

Thank you Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I appreciate your time today and I would be glad to stand for any questions.