

Dear Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Breese Iverson and Fahey, and Members of the House Rules Committee,

My name is Gregg Koskela. For almost four years, I served as the School Board Secretary in the Newberg School District.

I'm writing to urge you to support HB 4140 because I've come to understand both how important our public meeting laws are for transparency, and also how fragile the foundation of this fundamental democratic process is. Currently these laws rely on the good faith of our elected officials to abide by the law, and once that faith is gone, trust is broken.

My first week on the job in 2017, I was being trained to be Board Secretary by a very knowledgeable woman. "I get so nervous preparing these Board Packets!" she said. "I don't want to mess up the legal details!" She took her job seriously: inform the public what was coming up in the meeting, and provide all the background materials so anyone could see the essentials of each decision. She instilled that responsibility and sense of seriousness in me, and in our Board members.

Elected officials have the right and responsibility to vote their conscience as they consider matters. **What public meeting laws do is allow the public to watch the process every step of the way: to know what the issues are, what the background is, who the players are, and the reasons and arguments for each position.** We don't even necessarily have the right to shape or guide what our elected officials do, but we should be able to know what they are deciding, why they are deciding it, and who they are listening to.

So School Board members, or County Commissioners, or City Council members are not to discuss and deliberate outside of a public session. All discussion and especially all actions must be taken where the public can observe. This takes away temptations to make deals with buddies, for instance, or to have an influential person privately sway an official. It all should be done in the open, so that public accountability can hold our elected officials to integrity and consistency.

When I was Board secretary, we always published the agenda and Board Packet at least 24 hours ahead of time, so that the public knew what was being decided. If an issue came up, sometimes this meant having to call another meeting so we had time to notify the public. We all had that respect for the process ingrained into us.

Starting last summer, I watched our school Board begin to add items to the agenda at the meeting, without prior notice; significant things, like whole new policy proposals, spending public money to hire an additional attorney, and on November 9, 2021, to fire our Superintendent. They even went so far on August 10, 2021 as to vote and take action in an executive session, via a Zoom link that no one in the public had access to. ORS 192.660 explicitly states "No executive session may be held for the purpose of taking any final action or making any final decision." I've given a complete timeline with links to time stamps of Board video recordings here: <https://greggkoskela.org/newberg-school-board-history/>

We discovered there isn't much the public can do in response. Without HB 4140, the only remedies are education (which the Board had already chosen to ignore); lawsuits; or recall.

Breaking trust in this way leads us to question what else is being broken out of sight. **Whether it's a Board member I disagree with, or one I agree with, I want the integrity of this**

process so we can trust that we know what is being decided and what arguments are being made. We need more accountability than just education to restore this trust to our democratic process.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I urge you to vote yes on HB 4140.

Sincerely,
Gregg Koskela