



State of Washington
PUBLIC DISCLOSURE COMMISSION

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July 31, 2018

Delivered electronically to Karen Douglass, Superintendent Stevenson-Carson School District at “douglassk@scsd303.org”

Subject: Stevenson-Carson School District Complaint Return Cover Letter with Reminder, PDC Case 22588

Superintendent Douglass:

Below is a copy of an electronic letter sent to Jeanette Foster concerning the complaint she filed with the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) against the Stevenson-Carson School District. As noted below in the electronic letter to Ms. Foster, the PDC will not be conducting a more formal investigation into these allegations or taking enforcement action in this matter.

For your information, PDC staff reviewed the levy information produced and distributed by SCSD and found the overall tone and tenor of the publication to be fair and balanced, and the costs of the levy were clearly stated. However, PDC staff believes that two of the headings under “3 Things to Know about the Levy” (“It’s not a luxury” and “It’s essential”) were matters of opinion that should have been changed or removed from the publication.

PDC staff is reminding officials of the Stevenson-Carson School District that information distributed for any future ballot proposition needs to be fair and balanced, and not include statements of opinion.

If you have questions, please contact PDC staff member Kurt Young by e-mail at kurt.young@pdc.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

Endorsed by,

/s _____
Kurt Young, Compliance Officer

/s _____
Barbara Sandahl, Deputy Director
For Peter Lavalley, Executive Director



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July 31, 2018

Sent electronically to Jeanette Foster at "jfoster@gorge.net"

Subject: Complaint filed against Stevenson-Carson School District, PDC Case 22588

Ms. Foster:

The Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) has completed its review of the complaint you filed on July 11, 2017. Your complaint alleged that officials of the Stevenson-Carson School District may have violated RCW 42.17A.555 by using school district facilities to support an August 1, 2017 school district levy election.

PDC staff reviewed the allegations listed in your complaint, the statutes, rules and PDC Interpretation #01-03 Guidelines for School Districts in Election Campaigns, and the July 31, 2017, email response from Karen Douglass, Superintendent of the Stevenson-Carson School District (SCSD). As a result, we found the following:

- Ms. Douglass stated that based on RCW 28A.320.090, school districts have the statutory authority to make expenditures of public funds to prepare and distribute information to the public concerning the maintenance and operation of the school districts. She stated that the SCSD *"believes the mailer in question and public meetings regarding the upcoming maintenance and operations levy were a normal and regular part of the District's public information program authorized by RWC 28A.320.090."*
- Ms. Douglass stated the SCSD was acting *"in a regular manner"* when it scheduled community forums to provide citizens with information concerning the replacement levy and how the levy impacts the maintenance and operations of the district. She stated SCSD *"routinely hold public meetings in its facilities to explain various school district programs or issues on topics that are unrelated to levy elections."*
- Ms. Douglass stated during the 2016-17 school year, SCSD staff hosted three "Round Table Discussions" that were advertised by the district, open to the public, and held at the high school. She stated that two of the discussions provided information about specific topics such as extracurricular activities and the district budget, with the third discussion involving district issues in general.
- Ms. Douglass stated the district had statutory authority to conduct the "Round Table Discussions" in accordance with RCW 28A referenced above, "to provide the general public an opportunity to learn factual information and ask questions about the district's current operations and maintenance needs and intended use of the proposed levy."

- Ms. Douglass stated the district considered the requirements of RCW 42.17A.555 and believed the informational levy mailer complied with the statutory requirements and the guidelines found in PDC Interpretation #01-03 “Guidelines for School Districts in Election Campaigns.” She stated that the information in the flyer was an “objective and fair presentation of facts relevant to a ballot proposition” and those facts did not promote or oppose the ballot measure.
- Ms. Douglass stated that the mailer is considered part of SCSD’s normal and regular conduct, and the districts understanding the mailer was permissible provided the information does not influence “the outcome of a school district election.” She stated that based on that statute, the district does not believe that the levy information or informational community meetings violated the requirements of RCW 42.17A.555.
- PDC staff reviewed the levy information produced and distributed by SCSD and found the overall tone and tenor of the publication to be fair and balanced, and the costs of the levy were clearly stated. However, staff felt that two of the headings under “3 Things to Know about the Levy” (“It’s not a luxury” and “It’s essential”) were matters of opinion that should have been changed or removed from the publication.

Based on these findings, staff has determined that in this instance, there is no evidence that supports a finding of a material violation warranting further investigation against officials of the Stevenson-Carson School District. PDC staff is reminding officials of the Stevenson-Carson School District that information distributed for any future ballot proposition needs to be fair and balanced, and not include statements of opinion.

The PDC has closed the matter and will not be conducting a more formal investigation into your complaint or pursuing further enforcement action in this case. If you have questions, you may contact Kurt Young by e-mail at kurt.young@pdc.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

Endorsed by:

/s _____

Kurt Young
PDC Compliance Officer

/s _____

Barbara Sandahl, Deputy Director
For Peter Lavalley, Executive Director

cc: Karen Douglass, Superintendent Stevenson-Carson School District