

Complaint Description

Jimbobrewer reported an issue (Fri, 25 Jan 2019 at 9:21 AM)

The email from the district improperly uses advocacy in support of the pending levy ballot propositions. It does so by stating that:

the levies are "important", the levies support "critical day-to-day school operations, [and] safety and security improvements", that a funding gap remains, that voter-approved levies help bridge that gap, that local levies are needed and that those levies help Seattle Public School students succeed.

All of these statements are intended to induce support for the ballot propositions and are improper, even if factually accurate.

Original email from Seattle Public Schools:

From: Seattle Public Schools [mailto:publicaffairs@seattleschools.org]

Sent: Friday, January 18, 2019 4:50 PM

To: [redacted for personal privacy]

Subject: Why the Feb. 12 levies are important

Dear Families,

On February 12, Seattle voters will consider Prop. 1 & Prop. 2, two expiring levies—the Educational Programs & Operations (EP&O) levy and the Building Excellence V (BEX V) Capital levy. These expiring local levies fund critical day-to-day school operations, safety and security improvements, and construction to rebuild aging schools and add classrooms throughout the district.

Last year, Washington State changed its K-12 education funding model, also referred to as the “McCleary Fix.” As a result, a significant portion of state dollars collected from Seattle property owners, dollars that used to be under local control, are now distributed to other districts across the state. The increase in state funding helped a lot of other districts and we are supportive of this improvement for the state’s publicly educated students. However, while the new state funding model addresses some critical longtime needs, such as teachers’ salaries, here at Seattle Public Schools a gap remains. Voter-approved levies help bridge that funding gap.

Please watch [this video](#) to better understand why we need local levies for our students and how those tax dollars help Seattle Public Schools students succeed.

Additionally, the Seattle Times asked us a series of questions about our Feb. 12 levies and school funding in a January 8 editorial. We answered them and submitted our response on Jan. 10. The Times is not going to publish our response, but we think this information is important

for our parents, staff, and community to read: https://www.seattleschools.org/district/calendars/news/what_s_new/levies_updates/school_levies_are_critical

For more information about the EP&O and BEX V levies, visit: www.seattleschools.org/levies
Office of Public Affairs

Seattle Public Schools would like to continue connecting with you via email. If you prefer to be removed from our list, please contact Seattle Public Schools directly. To stop receiving all email messages distributed through our SchoolMessenger service, follow this link and confirm: [Unsubscribe](#)

SchoolMessenger is a notification service used by the nation's leading school systems to connect with parents, students and staff through voice, SMS text, email, and social media.

My email to SPS raising concerns:

Jim Brewer <jimbrewer@gmail.com>

to superintendent

Dear Superintendent Juneau.

A neighbor recently forwarded to me an email from the Public Affairs Office of SPS regarding the upcoming levy election. Set forth at the end of this message is the text of that email. The email content includes several statements that in my view advocate a “yes” vote on the levies. These include the statement that “...here at Seattle Public Schools a gap remains. Voter-approved levies help bridge that funding gap.” This appears to be a violation of RCW 42.17A.555, which prohibits the use of public agency facilities to promote a ballot proposition.

I have always voted for school levies, but I also have serious concerns about improper electioneering by public agencies. Before I file a complaint with the Washington Public Disclosure Commission, I would like to consider anything you can tell me about this communications activity.

I would appreciate a prompt response from you on this matter.

Sincerely, Jim Brewer

Email response from SPS Chief Public Affairs Officer

Campbell, Carri J <cjcampbell@seattleschools.org>

to me, John

Dear Mr. Brewer:

I am responding on behalf of the Superintendent's Office.

Thank you for your email dated January 20, 2019. You inquired as to whether the use by Seattle Public Schools of the phrase “a gap remains” and “voter-approved levies help bridge that funding gap” promotes a ballot measure in violation of RCW 42.17A.555. The District takes its legal responsibility under RCW 42.17A.555 very seriously. Each year we email staff and remind them of the rules around not using District resources to promote a candidate or ballot measure. We last did this on October 8, 2018. The District’s Public Affairs Department, the department I supervise, is also aware of PDC rules and works with the Legal Department to comply with PDC laws and guidance. Our levy materials are reviewed by the legal department.

We believe the statements in the January 18, 2019 communication are correct factual statements. There is a funding gap, i.e., the District spends more money on educational services than it receives from the State. The School Board, when it approved of the ballot measure had the OSPI Pre-Ballot Application as part of the materials (linked below). In the materials, it gives an example of how the “State allocates 9 nurses for 53,000 students in Seattle and levy funds are used to provide an additional 50 nurses.” We believe that this is a gap, and calling it a gap is factually correct. We further believe that informing the public of this gap is doing our due diligence to be accurate to the voting public. We made what we believed was a fair presentation of the facts and did not intend to violated PDC rules.

Board

link: https://www.seattleschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_543/File/District/Departments/School%20Board/18-19%20agendas/November%2014/A02_2018114_Resolution%201819-9%20BAR.pdf

Respectfully,

Carri

Carri Campbell
Chief Public Affairs Officer
Seattle Public Schools

What impact does the alleged violation(s) have on the public?

The violation unlawfully uses public agency facilities to support a "yes" vote on a pending ballot proposition.

List of attached evidence or contact information where evidence may be found.

Two emails from Seattle Public Schools. The first is the original email which violates the statute. The second is a response from the SPS Public Affairs Office defending the original email after I wrote the Superintendent to express my concern.

List of potential witnesses with contact information to reach them.

Seattle Public Schools Chief Public Affairs Officer Carri J Campbell:
cjcampbell@seattleschools.org

Complaint Certification:

I certify (or declare) under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that information provided with this complaint is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.