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Charles A. Gibson, Administrator of Elections  
Election Commission  
931 Industrial Park Drive  
Dandridge, TN 37725

December 6, 2021

Re: May 3, 2022 County School Board Primary

This is a letter I wish with all my heart that I hadn't had to write. Unfortunately, the opportunity to preserve the Jefferson County School Board as a non-partisan elected body was lost when the local Republican party quickly called for a school board primary after House Bill No. 72 of the Third Extraordinary Session (HB9072) was signed into law by Governor Bill Lee.

Most Tennesseans (including many common-sense Republicans) understand that introducing partisan politics into the business of promoting the intellectual, emotional, and physical growth of our children—along with their safety and overall wellbeing - amounts to nothing more than another chance to deepen the kind of divisiveness that is already impeding effectiveness in many other arenas of public life.

We regret the action taken by the legislature and the local Republican party and consider it a giant step backwards for our public schools. Young people will suffer the most when decisions regarding their education are influenced by grandstanding, political hay-making, and extremist views that keep us all farther apart. For their sakes, we should be doing the hard work of collaboration: working through differences (political and otherwise) and bringing our various perspectives to bear in order to secure their future success.

It is a great sadness to contemplate the most likely scenario that will result from this ill-conceived push for partisanship. We believe it will result in a new crop of extremist candidates that do not have a heart for or a commitment to public education. Instead of searching for insight and embracing compromise, they will automatically fall back on knee-jerk positions promoted by the political party with which they are affiliated. The policies adopted by our local school board shouldn't be "red" or "blue;" they should represent the collective wisdom of a diverse group of citizens who are guided by nothing less than what they feel in their hearts is the absolute best for our young people.

Democrats care deeply about public education, and we believe there are many on the opposite side of the political spectrum that share this sense of duty. But we also recognize that, in today's political climate, far too many aspects of public life have become defined by labels. This shortsighted move to politicize the School Board is eminently regrettable, and it may very well have implications that will reverberate through the years.

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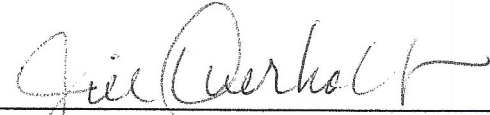
With the future of the next generation of Jefferson Countians in mind, we have no choice but to call for a Democratic primary. In the best-case scenario, a good balance of candidates from all ideological backgrounds will be elected. Nothing less than our children's education would be well-served, were that the case. But – honestly - how many times in recent years have we seen that kind of sensible and ultimately beneficial equilibrium achieved or maintained? We hope the good people of Jefferson County—folks from all across the political spectrum—will see this for what it is: an attempt by extremists to have their way and irreparably harm our educational system in the process.

We therefore request a May primary to be held concurrent to the one requested by the local Republican party for any and all school board offices on the August 2022 ballot, including any vacancies that may occur.

Sincerely,

  
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Laura Mallette, Chair

12/6/2021  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jill Overholt, Secretary

12/6/21  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Cc: Phyllis McCracken, Chairperson, Jefferson County Election Commission  
Betty Watkins, Secretary, Jefferson County Election Commission  
A.C. Carr, Member, Jefferson County Election Commission  
John Kramer, Jr., Member, Jefferson County Election Commission  
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