



October 26, 2021

Dear Members:

I am writing to you regarding the letter sent from the National School Boards Association (NSBA) to President Biden, dated September 29, 2021. I would like to let you know that the Wyoming School Boards Association (WSBA) had no role in drafting or disseminating the letter from NSBA to President Biden. We were not consulted and did not contribute to its contents. The first we saw of this communication was when it was released to the public. We regret that we did not have the opportunity to review the letter or be involved in discussions about the specific content of the letter prior to its release. We object to the tone and the language contained in this letter and have communicated that to NSBA. As such, we do not support a call for federal intervention into local matters.

Wyoming is a strong proponent of local control. That means we tend to think of the government closest to the people as the one that governs best. We believe in the First Amendment and its provision of free speech. We believe that our elected leaders need to hear from the communities that they govern. We value the voices of our parents and our communities. We value civil discourse and feedback that helps us to improve the educational opportunities for our students. We believe citizens have a duty to be civil in their discourse and their interactions with government leaders. Most instances in Wyoming have been civil. Unfortunately, there have been some instances where individuals have not acted in a civil manner. There is no place in our public discourse for behavior that is outside of the limits set by the law. Any criminal behavior, including but not limited to violence, threats, harassment, or intimidation, should not be tolerated. We have seen instances of some of these things in Wyoming. We believe local law enforcement is best suited to respond to these criminal acts. We do reject any form of violence for political ends at school board meetings. Civil discourse is a bedrock of our representative form of government. We believe that our local law enforcement agencies are the best partners for our local school boards to address the safety and security needs for their districts.

Wyoming has been a leader in asking NSBA to change its course. On October 22, 2021, NSBA issued an apology for the prior letter. They stated that the safety of school board members, staff, and students was a priority, and that work remains to be done on the issue but acknowledged that there no justification for some of the language contained in the letter. They recognized that they should have had a better process in place to allow for consultation and communication on a matter of this significance. They are engaging in a review of this matter and have promised to do better in the future. WSBA has worked with numerous other state school boards associations to address the harms caused by the letter and to call on NSBA to consider additional reforms that unite rather than divide our state associations.

The WSBA Board of Directors convened this past weekend. Among the topics discussed was consideration of our on-going relationship with NSBA. We believe that over its nearly 80 years

of existence, the National School Boards Association has done a lot of good. It has generally provided for strong legal and legislative advocacy for school boards across our country. It has provided for professional development opportunities for school board members with conferences on educational issues and school board leadership. NSBA has brought together people from across the country and allowed us opportunities to learn from our peers and to gain insights as to how other school systems deal with issues facing our districts. We have taken many good ideas from other states and have used them to help improve education in Wyoming. We believe that we are stronger together than we are on our own. It is our desire to see a strong and vibrant organization that meets the needs of school boards and provides opportunities for us to learn from each other.

Sadly, NSBA has been struggling as of late to address a number of internal governance issues. We believe that a number of states that have recently made decisions to leave NSBA have done so for reasons beyond the letter to President Biden. For some, that was simply the straw that broke the camel's back. They have said as much. They have pointed out that the failures of the organization to consider and serve member needs has come to a point where the cost of member dues no longer provides a sufficient value for the services rendered. This year, WSBA paid \$27,382 dollars in dues to NSBA. At this time, WSBA's Board of Directors feels that we are receiving important value for our dues, but we are concerned about our national organization and will continue to monitor the situation. We will not automatically renew our membership when the time comes. Instead, we will continue to evaluate the direction of NSBA and will continue to seek a strong national organization that meets the needs of school board members in our state. The Board has asked me to communicate our concerns with NSBA.

We feel fortunate to live in Wyoming where neighbors talk to neighbors and citizens talk to government officials. People here generally live within the law and those who chose not to do so face the consequences of their decisions. We have a great educational system and believe that it can continue to get better when all stakeholders work together. We want you to know that we value our member districts, and we want to make sure that our organization keeps focused on the needs of our members. Please be assured that we will continue to vigilantly monitor this situation. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this matter.

Thank you for all you do for education in Wyoming!

Regards,

Brian Farmer
Executive Director