

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

December 14, 2020

Chairman Satya Chandragiri
Salem-Keizer Board of Directors
Salem-Keizer School District 24j
2450 Lancaster Drive NE
Salem, Oregon 97305

Chair Chandragiri

I read your comments in the Statesman-Journal in total shock and disbelief. Then I reviewed past meeting materials. In what realm is a comparison between public service and domestic violence warranted? I write this letter out of necessity: community leaders must hold each other accountable when there is a problem and sir – I respectfully tell you that the way you and your allies conduct business is antithetical to your public charge. Your attitude toward the most vulnerable among us, the language to all who disagree, and your persistent claims of victimhood are an embarrassment to our state and community.

At any other time, the choice your board made this past meeting (December 8, 2020) would be national news. Unfortunately, we are navigating a time of political coarseness. However, the act – constraining the ability of the people to have a voice – shall remain as your enduring legacy. For the life of me, I cannot understand what it is you – or your allies – are doing. Your actions manifest the exact fears and frustrations long held by members of historically disadvantaged and underrepresented people: your “policy” giving license to ignore all and/or any that dare to disagree with you speaks to your own sense of entitlement and importance.

Many of our shared constituents have watched the behavior of the Salem-Keizer School Board with mounting concern. It was a significant issue during this recent campaign. There was hope your board could find your footing – that you would grow – into your responsibilities. It is now clear this is not the case. Until this moment, I had refused to add my name to the list of those seeking your resignation. Your actions on this matter have removed any doubt about your intentions: your cabal has no desire whatsoever to learn from past mistakes or listen to your own constituents. This conclusion compels me (and others) to reconsider the structural landscape.

As you know, Salem-Keizer School District 24j is unique. The State of Oregon owns a large portion of district property: property that is non-taxable. Accordingly, the state has a responsibility to ensure the success of your organization. We are aware of the direct and indirect impacts upon the ability of your schools to provide an adequate, equitable, and free educational experience for all students that attend because of the presence of multiple correctional institutions, the Oregon State Hospital, and other facilities. And we know that 24j requires good leadership in the best of times – and these are not the best of times.

Mr. Chairman: This letter is a formal notice of my intention to increase the formal nature of the relationship between the State of Oregon and Salem-Keizer School District 24j. Your recent actions underscore the unintended consequences of benign neglect. Your board has drifted because of a lack of support. Therefore, I have drafted – and shall seek to advance for passage – legislation that adds appointed positions (Governor appointed, Senate-confirmed) in equal number to elected positions and legislation that transforms the zone-based elections model to an at-large, position-based model.

This new governance model should provide our state and community a blended “best practices” approach for resolving our short-term and long-term challenges. It will provide for a more effective and efficient model for expanding dialogue, increasing equity, and policies that are the result of thoughtful, transparent decision-making. Your actions limiting the input for the men and women you represent have served to ring the bell for all of us: there is an exigent need for real, transformative change at 24j. We shall answer the call.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P. H. C.', written in a cursive style.