

Chairman Laible, members of the committee, for the record I am Cynthia Johnson, Pondera County Commissioner, Montana Association of Counties immediate past President and most importantly, a Pondera County taxpayer who lives in a consolidated school district which causes my school related property taxes to be paid entirely to another county. I rise in strong support of HB 488.

Some may testify that my community voted to consolidate in 2005. In our democratic form of school governance, indeed, the majority of the voters did vote to consolidate. I would venture that the majority of those who pay the taxes to support the school district did not. And while I certainly appreciate my fellow community member's passion, I did not support the consolidation but we were all functioning under an established set of rules. We understood that at some point in the future, we would be able to petition to change the boundaries of the newly formed school district.

In 2007, the rules changed and the legislature effectively took away my opportunity to petition my property into another district with the requirement to obtain written agreement from both school boards. There is no school board in their right mind that would agree to giving up part of their tax base. The relationship in this consolidated district between counties has become so contentious that the controlling interest on the school board has recently acted contrary to the results of a district wide survey and changed the manner in which school board members are elected to eliminate the opportunity for any meaningful representation from the non controlling county.

With this lack of representation, consider my personal statistics. I farm in possibly the farthest away corner of this school district. My children

have always attended school in the nearest school in my county, 23 miles from home, and my taxes have always been paid to the school farthest away, now 45 miles. Since the consolidation, in 2005, I have paid \$46,926 in property taxes and \$13,937 of those dollars have gone to support a school in another county. This amount is the same district-wide. 29.7% of our tax dollars are supporting a school in another county. This amount is in addition to the amount sent to the state of Montana for equalization and University mills.

Chairman Laible, members of the committee, residents of this consolidated district deserve the opportunity to let their taxes support the school where they, their children, their parents and grandparents have always attended school. This minor change will not fix the territory transfer laws as they relate to school districts but it will restore the opportunity to seek equality.

As the immediate past President of the Montana Association of Counties, I would share with you the Resolution passed at the annual meeting in 2008 which will be or has been distributed.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and thank you, also for your dedication and service to the state of Montana and her people.

We urge a DO PASS on House Bill 488.