

Dear Public Disclosure Commission,

Richland School District submits this response regarding the complaint received related to a halftime announcement made at a Richland High School basketball game.

During the announcement, the Athletic Director referenced programs supported by levy funding and encouraged community members to mark their calendars and “vote for the levy.” The District acknowledges that this specific wording was used. The intent of the statement was not to advocate for approval of the levy, but rather to encourage community members to participate in the election process and to be informed when voting. No additional language urging support, approval, or a “yes” vote was intended, planned, or communicated.

The District also acknowledges the complainant’s assertion that students were present on the gym floor during the announcement and that this presence was intended to evoke an emotional response. The District respectfully clarifies that the presence of students was not intended to influence voters or create an emotional appeal. Rather, the intent was to provide a representative example of student programs and activities supported through levy-funded educational opportunities. No direction was given to students, and their presence was not orchestrated to advocate for levy approval.

The complaint further asserts that a recording of the announcement was made by Terah, a Richland School District employee, and subsequently shared on social media as a means to persuade voters. The District acknowledges that the individual referenced is a District employee; however, the recording and posting were made on the individual’s own time, using a personal device, and shared through a personal social media account. The District did not direct, request, or authorize the recording or dissemination of the video, nor was District equipment, resources, or official communication channels used. Under Public Disclosure Commission guidance and RCW 42.17A.555, public employees retain the right to engage in political expression in their personal capacity when not acting within the scope of employment or using public resources.

Nevertheless, the District recognizes that the combination of the language used, the setting of a school-sponsored event, the role of district employees, and the presence of students before a captive audience could reasonably be perceived as advocacy, raising concerns under RCW 42.17A.555.

Upon becoming aware of the issue, the District took prompt corrective action. District leadership reviewed the incident, met with the staff member involved, and issued clear internal guidance reinforcing Public Disclosure Commission requirements and the limitations outlined in RCW 42.17A.555.

Richland School District is committed to full compliance with Washington election laws and to ensuring staff clearly understand the distinction between permissible informational communications and impermissible advocacy. Appropriate steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence of this issue.

The District appreciates the opportunity to respond and will cooperate fully with any additional requests from the Commission.

Respectfully Submitted,