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MARJORIE R. ESMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

January 15, 2010

Via fax 985-748-8587 and email to each board member

Ms. Ann Smith
Mr. Robert Potts
Mr. Leonard Genco
Mr. Al Link

Mr. Danny Ridgel
Ms. Sonya Traylor
Mr. Eric Dangerfield
Ms. Sandra Bailey-Simmons
Ms. Rose Dominguez

To the Tangipahoa Parish School Board:

It has come to our attention that on January 5, 2010 the Policy Committee of the Tangipahoa Parish School Board voted to recommend to the full School Board that the submission timeframe for general Public Input forms be changed to "48 hours prior to the Board Meeting" instead of the current "prior to the beginning of the Board meeting." I understand that this proposal may come before the full School Board on January 19, 2010. This letter is to urge the School Board not to adopt this proposed change.

As you know, the law strongly favors public participation in government meetings. LSA R.S. 42:5.1 provides that "each school board. . . shall allow public comment at any meeting of the school board prior to taking any vote. The comment period shall be for each agenda item and shall precede each agenda item."

To emphasize the importance of public participation, LSA R.S. 42:7 provides as follows:

It is essential to the maintenance of a democratic society that public business be performed in an open and public manner and that the citizens be advised of and aware of the performance of public officials and the deliberations and decisions that go into the making of public policy. Toward this end, the provisions of R.S. 42:4.1 through 10 shall be construed liberally.

In other words, the law requires more, rather than less, opportunity for public participation and comment.

Requiring the public to submit a request to comment 48 hours in advance of a public meeting will make it harder for people to participate because it will require more advance planning. It is unclear how members of the public are expected to submit their Public Input forms if they cannot do so at the meeting itself. Because the board meets on Tuesday evenings, 48 hours before would require submission of a form on Sunday evening, which means that the School Board office would have to be open to receive forms at that time, or effectively require submission of the form on Friday before.

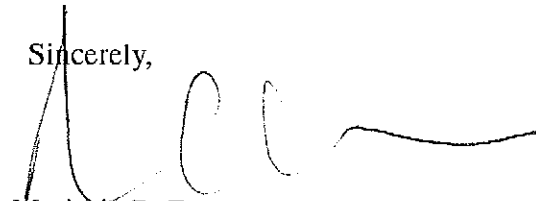
If you adopt this change, the Tangipahoa Parish School Board will tell residents that it does not respect their right to speak, that it does not understand family scheduling difficulties, and that it is willing to impose additional burdens on those who simply wish to speak on public

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matters of importance. Residents of Tangipahoa Parish have the right to expect their elected officials to follow the guidance of the Louisiana legislature and understand that public meetings must be more public, and not less so.

I therefore urge you to honor the law and to keep the rules for public input as they are, without the proposed change.

Sincerely,



Marjorie R. Esman
Executive Director

cc: Mr. Mark Kolwe, Superintendent by fax and email
Mr. Chris Moody