

A bill by Rep. Margaret Doherty, D-Tigard, would effectively remove Kim Sordyl, Secretary of State Dennis Richardson's designee as non-voting member of the state education board.



[JAIME VALDEZ/PORTLAND TRIBUNE](#) - Kim Sordyl, a Portland Public Schools parent, represents Secretary of State Dennis Richardson as a non-voting member of the Oregon State Board of Education.

SALEM — Rep. Margaret Doherty, D-Tigard, has filed a bill for the February lawmaking session that would effectively remove an outspoken, non-voting board member from the Oregon Board of Education.

The [bill](#) follows proposed State Board of Education rules that also would have ousted Kim Sordyl, a Portland Public Schools parent whom Secretary of State Dennis Richardson chose to represent him as a non-voting member on the education board.

The bill would require Richardson and Treasurer Tobias Read — who hold non-voting membership on the board — to send a deputy officer to represent them instead of a designee of their choosing. The proposed rule by the Board of Education would have restricted their designees to state employees.

"Seeking to pass a law for the sole purpose of silencing Kim Sordyl, is shameful," Richardson said. "She is one of Oregon's foremost public school advocates for children and parents."

Sordyl, a former employment attorney and a Democrat who worked on Richardson's campaign in 2016, began representing him on the board in January 2017. Richardson in 2016 became the state's first Republican elected to statewide office in two decades.

Sordyl has been a vocal critic of both Portland Public Schools and Oregon's education system, which yields the nation's third lowest on-time graduation rate.

Debra Royal, Richardson's chief of staff, said Sordyl is "a watch dog for students and parents, asks the difficult questions—questions the entrenched leaders of our educational system would rather avoid."

In August, the Board of Education proposed rules that, Sordyl and Royal said, appeared designed to censor her critical public statements and remove her from the board.

Board members were scheduled to vote on the rules in September but held off after Steve Elzinga, counsel for the Secretary of State's Office, wrote an [email](#) to Oregon Department of Education administrators, asserting that the proposed rules violated state law — including free speech rights — and reached beyond the board's authority.

For instance, one proposed change would require board members to "support the decision of the majority after honoring the right of individual members to express opposing viewpoints and vote their convictions."

Another would require board members to obtain permission from the board chair to create a social media account for State Board of Education purposes, and it would have made any content from the social media account a public record.

Elzinga said a personal social media account identifying an individual as a board member does not represent a public record.

"It is only a public record if they are conducting business," he wrote.

Sordyl keeps a public official [Facebook page](#) in which she identifies herself as a member of the Board of Education.

In answer to a question about whether the rule changes targeted Sordyl, Peter Rudy, a public affairs specialist at ODE, said: "The State Board of Education periodically reviews and updates its policies and operating procedures."

Board Chairman Charles Martinez was traveling Wednesday and could not immediately respond to the Pamplin/EO Capital Bureau's inquiries, Rudy said.

Doherty's bill, proposed Wednesday, would effectively remove Sordyl from the board by requiring that non-voting members be the secretary of state and treasurer's deputies. The board had proposed a rule restricting non-voting membership to state employees, but Elzinga also challenged the legality of that change.

Doherty, chairwoman of the House Education Committee, said she proposed the bill because Board of Education members have to deal with sensitive information and the non-voting seats are meant to represent the offices of the secretary of state and treasurer.

She included the bill among three she asked the committee to sponsor during the 2018 lawmaking session. Committee members voted 8-to-1 Wednesday for the committee to sponsor the bills, with one objection from Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn.

Parrish, who also worked on Richardson's campaign, said she opposes Doherty's proposal because it strips the secretary of state of some of his elected power.

Rep. Carl Wilson, R-Grants Pass, voted in favor of sponsoring the bills, but he said that doesn't necessarily reflect his support of them.

Sordyl said she learned about the bill from Parrish Wednesday. Sordyl sent out a tweet stating that a former OEA lobbyist was trying to remove her from the board.

"Get in line," she tweeted. "Administrators have already tried. I'll continue demanding students become top priority in (Oregon) education. (Administrators and) unions had priority (for too) long. It's time for a culture shift."

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