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Editorial: Don't change rules to ban state school board member



The Oregon State Capitol (John Gottberg Anderson / Bulletin file photo)

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Legislators shouldn't manipulate the rules to silence voices they don't like. But that appears to be what's at work with a proposed bill to change who can sit on the State Board of Education.

Republican Dennis Richardson, Oregon's secretary of state, and Democrat Tobias Read, its treasurer, are nonvoting members of the State Board of Education. They may appoint someone to sit in their places on the board. Richardson's choice, Portland lawyer Kim Sordyl, is outspoken, so much so that there's a move afoot to change the law that enables her to take Richardson's place.

State Rep. Margaret Doherty, D-Tigard, is behind the effort according to the Portland Tribune. The paper says she's the original sponsor of what's now known as legislative concept 112. The House Education Committee, which she chairs, voted to make it and two other proposals anonymous committee

bills Wednesday. Doherty's measure would require both the secretary of state and treasurer to appoint members of their own staffs to sit on the education board.

We called Doherty's office and did not get a call back.

To say that Sordyl is outspoken is to put it mildly. Her complaints about Portland Public Schools have been loud and frequent, and the district's attempts to quiet her down have failed. She and Beth Slovik, a reporter, are being sued by that district in an attempt to avoid having to cough up public records the district would rather not release.

Sordyl has been no less outspoken on the Board of Education, to which Richardson appointed her last year. In fact, the higher ed board was to have voted in September 2017, on a proposal that would have limited Sordyl's use of social media to criticize the board. It held off on that vote after the secretary of state's lawyer, Steve Elzinga, wrote to it, arguing that the vote would violate both state law and Sordyl's right to free speech.

Doherty's measure is apparently another attempt to silence Sordyl.

Sordyl may be challenging and even thorny. But those are not crimes. Lawmakers should reject this maneuver to silence a critic.

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