



November 15, 2018

Editorial Board
The Seattle Times
PO Box 70
Seattle, WA 98111

Dear Editor:

The Seattle Times' November 12 editorial makes a big fuss over the League of Women Voters of Seattle-King County's decision not to endorse the Seattle Families, Education, Preschool and Promise Plan (FEPP) Levy in the recent election. In doing so, it misrepresents both the League's position and also the recent opinion of the Washington State Supreme Court upholding the Charter School Act.

The *Times* is correct that the Court upheld charter schools as a constitutional means of educating students in *El Centro de la Raza v. Washington*;¹ the League is not questioning the constitutionality of these institutions. What the League does take issue with—and what the *El Centro* decision explicitly did not address—is the narrower question of whether public levy dollars are an appropriate funding source for charter schools.

To reach its decision, the Court relied in part on the fact that charter schools do not receive public funding. Under Washington law, charter schools are distinguished from “common” (also known as “public”) schools, the former receiving lottery funds rather than the state's general funds, which are off-limits to charter schools. There is also language in the Charter School Act that may prevent Seattle charter schools from receiving local levy dollars. So while it is perhaps well-intentioned, it is misleading for the *Times* to admonish the League and suggest we are advocating that charter students be “excluded from the levy their parents are paying for.” They may already be excluded as a matter of law.

The League's opposition to the FEPP levy is consistent with this, and with our long-standing position that government must be transparent, accessible, and accountable to the public it serves. Charter schools are governed by private boards selected by nonprofit corporations rather than publicly elected by citizens. As such, voters have no oversight as to how their public dollars are spent. Accountability concerns aside, the League also believes that levies are supposed to provide short-term funding solutions to emergent issues; they are not long-

¹ *El Centro de la Raza v. Washington*, No. 94269-2, slip. op. at 27 (Wash. Oct. 25, 2018). Available at <http://www.courts.wa.gov/opinions/pdf/942692.pdf>.

term funding sources to be renewed in perpetuity. Moreover, FEPP levy funds were not needed until 2020, which would have given the City of Seattle time to more thoroughly engage the community on these important issues.

To be clear, the League greatly appreciates and respects Mayor Durkan and the City of Seattle's efforts and advocacy of on behalf of our youth. Since many of our members are educators, elected officials, parents, administrators, and education advocates with decades of experience in the educational system, we understand the challenges and constraints they face. And at the end of the day, we all share the common goal of helping Seattle students succeed.

But as a strong proponent of informed, civil discourse, the League believes it is important not to mischaracterize a call for accountability, specificity, or compliance with the law as general "hostility" toward charter schools or their students. We are simply doing what we have been doing successfully for nearly a century—empowering voters and defending democracy.

Regards,



Stephanie Cirkovich, President

cc: The Honorable Jenny Durkan
Seattle City Council