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HAND DELIVERED

Board of Supervisors of  
Spotsylvania County  
Spotsylvania Courthouse, VA

RE: School Board Abuses of Closed Session

Dear Supervisors –

I am asking now a second time for your consent to make public the following information that I received during the course of my employment as your County Attorney. My desire to make this disclosure is for the good of our community. I am a Spotsylvania County taxpayer & registered voter, and in those capacities I am gravely concerned about the manner in which our school system – which consumes >75% of county resources – is run by the School Board. Though the information at hand is aging a bit, I have no basis upon which to conclude that any change has occurred in the School Board's practices or that this information is out of date.

This is what I want to make public:

The Board of Supervisors directed me to ask Commonwealth's Attorney Bill Neely to investigate Dr. Hill's publication of information on the Bond Referendum, apparently contrary to state law. Mr. Neely recused himself from that investigation asserting a conflict of interest based on the fact that his wife was a school teacher. Neely referred the investigation of Dr. Hill to the to King George Commonwealth's Attorney Matt Britton. Britton talked to me about the case after that referral was made, assuring me that the matter was fully out of Spotsylvania County hands and in his own, as Special Prosecutor.

Thereafter, School Board member Ray Lora came to see me at my office – dropped in without an appointment, wanting to see me about "the situation." I stated very clearly to Ray from the beginning that I was not his lawyer and, relative to the pending matter regarding the bond referendum, not necessarily his friend. Ray said he understood my position, and given his experience and sophistication I had reason to believe him. Ray Lora talked about 2 issues – (1) the bond referendum, and (2) School Board closed session practices.

(1) The bond referendum is old news, and I'll say the following about it, or not, as the Board of Supervisors sees fit:

Lora told me that he was going to talk to Matt Britton about Dr. Hill's actions regarding the bond referendum because, according to Lora, Dr. Hill had clearly violated the law.

Lora went on to say that he felt compelled to speak up, regardless of the consequences and for the good of the community, because the handling of the bond referendum by Dr. Hill and the School Board was, in Lora's words, just not right.

(2) Lora's second issue is the one I am concerned about now in relation to the pending election. (The story could just begin here – that Ray came to see me & talked about closed session practices.)

Ray Lora told me that he anticipated testifying in the matter about Dr. Hill, and that he realized that he had to speak up at the same time about how Dr. Hill runs the School Board and their chronic abuse of the closed session law. Lora admitted that, under Dr. Hill's direction, the School Board typically discussed and decided essentially all of its business behind closed doors, "rubber stamping" its decisions with votes in open session. Lora was adamant that most, if not all, of the closed session certifications that he had voted as a School Board member were false, because the School Board never disclosed all that was actually discussed in closed session. I asked Ray if he understood the magnitude of what he was saying and whether he was prepared to take the consequences of telling the truth – Ray responded that he had weighed the cost, and realized that it was time to tell the truth for the good of the community. Ray Lora's final word to me on the School Board's closed session abuse was that it had to stop, regardless of the cost. I directed him to Matt Britton and thanked him for his willingness to tell the truth.

From what I can see, the rest of the story (so far) is that Matt Britton got out-played by Dr. Hill & the School Board on the bond referendum issue and Ray Lora & the School Board went back to "business as usual" including their closed session habits.

We taxpayers trust our local government with lots of our money. Our School Board ends up with control over most of our local government money – and the vast majority of us trust the School Board with our kids, too. At the very, very least, our School Board should be operating the "in the sunshine" like all local government bodies in Virginia are supposed to. I am both amazed and ashamed that nothing has been done to rectify the chronic closed session abuse that Ray Lora described to me in my office. As Ray said to me that day: "This is not right; it's got to change."

It has got to change. That's why I have brought this issue back to you a second time. That's why I want to take this issue public, as an issue for the whole School Board. This is an issue for those School Board members who seek either re-election to the School Board or election to the Board of Supervisors. I think the citizens deserve the kind on closed session & open government practices that the Board of Supervisors has cultivated over years. The School Board's closed session practices – as Ray Lora described to them me - need to be carefully corrected and any re-play of their abuses strictly avoided in the future, for the good of the community.

Respectfully, I ask your consent to my speaking out publicly on one or both of the issues described herein, particularly issue #2. Our community deserves better than a School Board operating behind closed doors.

Thank you for your consideration,



Mark B. Taylor