



## The Facts About Addressing Willful Disruption at School Board Meetings

In some California communities, school boards have been forced to abandon meetings because of unlawful disruptions that prevent them from acting on items to support schools and serve their local students. Many trustees and staff have been subjected to verbal abuse and the threat of physical harm, including death threats made against them and their family members. CSBA has heard from local school board members who are concerned for their personal safety and the safety of others in their school communities.

Here are the facts:

### **Fact #1: CSBA believes that civic engagement is essential for democratic governance and supports First Amendment Rights**

CSBA supports and promotes civic engagement with public schools and embraces the individual right to freely, safely, and lawfully express views on issues before public school boards, be it through peaceful protest or public comments at meetings. CSBA encourages civic engagement that allows participants to express their First Amendment rights, while honoring state laws prohibiting willful disruption.

### **Fact #2: When requested, local law enforcement should respond to help restore order when public safety is at risk.**

School trustees are in a unique position as elected officials who have direct contact with the public. While they are accustomed to criticism and controversy, the current environment has produced increased conflict and hostility at some board meetings. Most local law enforcement agencies throughout the state have been good partners in ensuring school board meeting safety in the event of unlawful disruptions. Yet, reports from school governing board members indicate that a select number of local law enforcement agencies have declined to restore order and uphold the relevant state laws pertaining to the willful disruption of board meetings when requested by local boards.

In a letter dated September 24, 2021, CSBA requested that the State of California persuade local law enforcement to uphold the law and restore order when contacted by local governing boards seeking to mitigate public safety risks resulting from willful and unlawful disruptions at school board meetings.

### **Fact #3: CSBA was unaware of the NSBA letter to the Biden Administration prior to its publication**

On September 29, the National School Boards Association submitted a letter to President Biden's administration attempting to address the pressing issue of unsafe school board meetings and threats to students, staff, and trustees. CSBA disagrees with portions of the letter, particularly references to domestic terrorism and the Patriot Act, and has communicated that to the press since the publication of the NSBA letter. CSBA had no involvement in or awareness of NSBA's letter. Our letter to Gov. Newsom, which was sent prior to the publication of the NSBA letter, centered on activities occurring in California that were shared by our members, and did not include a request for federal assistance.

CSBA wants to ensure school board meetings are safe for board members, students, staff, and the public. CSBA also expects board meetings to be safe and lawful gatherings where the democratic process can flourish, and all community members can exercise their First Amendment rights. To that end, we will continue to help governing boards advance their local efforts through our member training and by providing resources for productive community engagement.

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*The California School Boards Association is the statewide voice for public education in California, and we lead every day with our mission to strengthen and promote school board governance and help ensure that school board meetings are safe, lawful, and productive for public schools and the students they serve.*