

Do's and Don'ts: Communicating About the August TRE

June 23, 2017

On June 22, 2017, the Port Arthur ISD Board of Trustees adopted an order calling for a Tax Ratification Election (TRE) for August 5, 2017. Port Arthur voters will be asked to ratify the new Maintenance and Operations (M&O) tax rate of \$1.17. You can read about this election on the District's website. We have provided information as a way to educate and inform the public about this election.

In preparation for the August election, the District would like to provide a reminder about what schools, the District, and employees can and cannot communicate about the TRE election when using District resources.

State law prevents districts from using public funds or resources, including intercampus mail, district facilities or district-sponsored events, to advocate for or against a **TRE**. School districts and their employees **may communicate only factual information**. Please review the information and guidelines below on the do's and don'ts of communicating about the TRE.

Knowing the Law

The law that dictates how public funds can or cannot be used for political advertising, such as advocating for or against a **TRE**, can be found in the Texas Election Code. Section 255.003 in the code stipulates that:

- (a) An officer or employee of a political subdivision (school district) may not spend or authorize the spending of public funds for political advertising.
- (b) Subsection (a) **does not apply** to a communication that **factually describes** the purposes of a measure **if the communication does not advocate passage or defeat** of the measure.
- A person who violates this section commits an offense, which, under this section, is a Class A misdemeanor.

Do's and Don'ts

To better understand the intent of the law, please review the following examples of what you, as an employee, can and cannot do when communicating about the **TRE**.

As a PAISD employee DO:

- Provide factual information in English and Spanish.
- Provide factual information about the dollar amount of tax increase to tax payers.
- Provide factual information on voting times and locations.
- Provide factual information on student growth, performance data, and needs of the district.

As a PAISD employee DON'T

- Don't use district funds or resources to advocate for or against the **TRE**.
- Don't advocate for or against the **TRE** using district time.
- Don't use the district's communication systems, including e-mail, telephone, and text messaging, to advocate for or against the **TRE**. (e.g. sending and or forwarding an email advocating for or against the **TRE** would be a direct violation of the law)
- Don't allow a third-party to distribute promotional materials advocating for or against the TRE in district facilities during district-sponsored events.

Need more info?

To find more information on how state law affects your communications about the TRE, please visit the Texas Election Code and the Texas Ethics Commission websites.