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Offic
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Call

for Repeal of Ban on Sharing Information about Ballot Proposals (video)

(Crystal A. Proxmire, Jan. 21, 2016)

Roseville, MI – “There is a stereotype of librarians as being quiet and meek. I hope that our presence today helps to debunk that stereotype. And if they want to throw us in jail for sharing information, they better make room in the jail cells!” said Ferndale Area District Library Director Jessica Keyser on Thursday.

Keyser was one of 70 local officials or administrators who gathered at a fire station in Roseville to rally against a law recently signed by Governor Rick Snyder that bans officials from sharing information about local ballot proposals via TV, mail, or radio in the 60 days preceding an election.



In Michigan cities, townships, villages, libraries, and school districts have to go to the public with ballot proposals to fund their operations. These entities were already barred from advocating for or against the millage or bond proposals. However, they were allowed to share basic information such as explaining what the proposals meant in more simple language, explaining what funds would be used for, and letting voters know if the proposal was a tax increase or a renewal. They also could use

public forums, which could be recorded and shared on local TV channels. None of this is acceptable now, leaving officials scratching their heads about how to respond to residents without facing jail time or fines.

The crowd of officials was led by Congressperson Sander Levin, and included Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel, Warren Mayor Jim Fouts, Royal Oak Mayor Jim Ellison, Huntington Woods City Manager Amy Sullivan, Ferndale City Manager April Lynch, and

dozens of other school board members, superintendents, city managers, mayors, commissioners and council members from as geographically and economically diverse communities as West Bloomfield and Pleasant Ridge, to Eastpointe, Warren and Hazel Park. ❌

Hazel Park City Manager Ed Klobucher talked about a recent vote that created a partnership between Hazel Park and East Pointe for funding fire services. It was a complicated issue that officials answered many questions on. Klobucher spoke of the town hall meetings and city council meetings. "We televise those meeting son our local TV channel. That was an important way for our residents to get that information about this proposal. Under this new rule we could not be able to do that. Now residents would be deprived of that critical information," he said.



Dr. Robert Glass, Superintendent of Bloomfield Hills Schools, cited The Federalist Papers #10, penned by John Adams, which called for the importance of debating issues of consequence and the importance of having elected representatives trusted to understand issues and to act on the public's behalf. Proponents of the gag order say it is to prevent public dollars from being used to campaign for or against an issue. Dr. Glass responded to this by explaining "All of our communications are vetted, and most school districts, if not all school districts, vet their communication through legal counsel."

Sterling Heights Mayor Michael Taylor remembered a time not long ago when Governor Snyder came to local officials with help explaining a proposal – the recent road funding initiative known as Proposal A. "Governor Snyder was touring the state," Taylor said. "I heard his speech 3 or 4 times. I also had the occasion to meet on a conference call with mayors throughout the State of Michigan where he implored us to get out in front of our cities, get out in front of our ❌

residents, and tell voters what this proposal is about...

"I specifically asked 'are you going to provide us with info?' and he said 'yes, we will provide you with the talking points. We will provide you with the handouts that you can take to your residents, hold public forms, talk about it at council meetings. Less than one year later Governor Snyder has signed a law that would make me a criminal for doing what he asked me to do less than 12 months ago."

Governor Snyder signed the legislation in spite of calls from officials across the state and across party lines urging him to veto it. However, he has asked the legislature to work on clarifications that would allow for communication about information.

"This provision was passed in a cloak of darkness and we're going to shine a light on it," Congressperson Levin said. "We're going to turn up so much heat they're going to repeal the gag order."

NOTE: Video will be added when available:

Previous stories:

<http://oaklandcounty115.com/2016/01/06/questions-about-ballot-issues-new-law-signed-by-snyder-prevents-discussion/>

<http://oaklandcounty115.com/2016/01/05/local-government-leaders-ask-snyder-to-veto-sb-571/>

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