

**From:** [John Halkias](#)  
**To:** [viola garcia](#)  
**Cc:** [Beverly Slough](#); [Steven Chapman](#); [2021-2022 Board of Directors](#)  
**Subject:** Re: NSBA Letter to President Biden on Threats School Boards Members and Public Schools  
**Date:** Wednesday, October 6, 2021 1:42:01 PM

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Dear Board and Officers,

I do not write this email lightly.

Today the Ohio Legislature debated their voucher “backpack” bill. In that debate a legislator used the NSBA letter as fodder for his speech as to how out of touch board members are with their communities. All we have worked for in Ohio to push back on this bill using public money for private education is now in jeopardy. I have seen the responses from NSBA, and they are weak to say the least. The perception is what now matters, and we are painted as an extremist organization, out of touch with our parents and our communities.

Ohio had not made their decision on NSBA membership, but this may have been the last nail as Ohio’s legislative division now cannot do their jobs unless they distance themselves from NSBA. And Ohio was a more moderate state.

Last night Kathy, Don and I met to consider meeting with our Region states as we have been tasked to by the Board to listen to their concerns and bring those concerns back to the board at our next meeting this month. It may now be too late for that as things are moving and changing rapidly as state associations come under fire.

Calls are being made to disband state associations and not allow them to be funded if they join and fund NSBA.

All of this due to this letter.

We already were hearing that we were not serving our members. Now, NSBA is seen not only as not serving our members, but also as a board and leadership out of touch with their members. I remember Chip saying in one of our meetings that NSBA understood the issues affecting school board members now, and how school board members were under duress, and that NSBA understood and was formulating ways to help. I agreed with that. What I expected was for NSBA to help us come up with tools for us to deal with the adversity, and for NSBA leadership understanding how difficult things were right now for all of us.

I did not expect a letter asking the Federal government to step in and strip away our local

control.

Right now, I do not know if there is a way forward out of this and save NSBA.

I do believe Chip needs to be replaced as interim CEO immediately. I believe we need someone with experience to take the reins like a retired CEO from another state.

This letter needs to be walked back as far as it can be as misguided, and not reflective of the beliefs of our membership. I don't know if that will put this genie back in the bottle.

I believe the Board needs to call an emergency meeting for tomorrow evening or Friday evening to deal with this crisis and the way forward. This cannot wait until October 21. I also think anyone involved with approval of the letter needs to refuse any interviews or further statements to the press until the board meets and decides on direction. Doubling down on this action is the wrong thing to do right now.

Viola, I do not know what advice I can give you as a signatory to that letter. I do not know what if anything will now satisfy our membership. You will have to make your own decision regarding that.

But anything may be too late at this point.

Quite frankly, I am struggling, and want to let you know that as a Board member I may not be with you much longer either through my own action, or the action of my state. Both Ohio and I have a lot to think about concerning such a decision. Ohio may already be well across that bridge now.

School Boards need a strong and unified national voice. I strongly believe that, and no matter what happens I will continue to advocate for that. However I cannot support, condone, or make excuses for how our leadership has politicized our work and jumped feet first into the polarized environment that has now become America. When I became President of our state association, I prided myself in my speech that during the time of polarizing politics in our state and our nation that School Board Members stood above such fray and were united no matter our political stripe by standing up for public education and the children we serve. I held school board members up as an example for the rest of the country.

That idea has now been destroyed, and I do not know if it can recover.

If you are in a state that is not experiencing any of this, I truly believe you are the exception to the national firestorm, and you could end up being all that remains of NSBA.

This is THAT serious at this point.

I look forward to your counsel. If you think I am being reactionary, I would tell you we may do that at the peril of the entire organization and its ultimate survival. As I said, I do not write this lightly. I have never met most of you in person. I am a "junior" member of this board, and have tried to use my ears instead of my voice as I have navigated my service on this Board. I cannot keep listening at this point.

John

John W. Halkias  
Plain Local Schools  
Board Member  
NSBA Central Region Director  
2019 OSBA Past President  
Term 2018-2021  
Home Phone: [REDACTED]  
Cell : [REDACTED]

On Oct 2, 2021, at 7:58 AM, viola garcia <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Good morning NSBA Directors,

First of all, I want to thank you for your active engagement and recent responses. These are troubling times. NSBA has been engaged with the White House and the Department of Education on these and other issues related to the pandemic for several weeks now. The pandemic and our heightened political environment have created a lot of tension in our society.

School boards have been under the spotlight since the start of the pandemic, but it's risen to a new level over the last few weeks. We felt compelled to say something when we started hearing about the threats, harassment, and acts of intimidation at school board meetings.

What we have witnessed are coordinated efforts, *playbooks*, for creating chaos at school board meetings and in local communities. Letters across states are very similar and these incidents are beyond random acts. What we are now seeing is a pattern of threats and violence occurring across state lines and via online platforms, which is why we need the federal government's assistance.

Disagreements are one thing, even among us, but what we're seeing is rising to a dangerous level in some instances. We also want the public to understand that these disruptions are interfering with school boards' most important business—ensuring the health, safety, and education of our students. These disruptions are interfering with the REAL issues facing school boards—ensuring we have enough good teachers for all students; serving students with disabilities; and making sure all kids have access to their internet in their homes. That's what school board members care about. It's why we decided to run for school board. We want to get back to the business of making sure that every student is preparing for a successful future.

I know, and we all acknowledge that email as a mode of communication about these serious matters does not optimize our ability to work through this together. I will follow up with the officers and Chip to coordinate next steps for all of us.

Regards, stay well and stay safe,

Viola

On Saturday, October 2, 2021, 12:11:18 AM CDT, Steven Chapman

<[REDACTED]> wrote:

My hope for a letter like this, or any letter that we are going to send to the President of the United States and push through a press release is at least reviewed by the executive committee.

That being said, in Arizona earlier this year a governing board was forced to leave their boardroom due to security issues with those in attendance. After the board and staff left the room, those in the audience decided that it would be alright for them to stage their own board meeting, elect new board members, and vote on their own items. A month or so ago, we had an individual film himself with a parent and that parent's student on their way to a school site with a pair of zip tie handcuffs to arrest a principal for enforcing a quarantine policy that was approved by the county and state. And these are just a few of several examples just in my state. These are not acts of concerned parents, nor should they be dismissed as just one off situations.

I agree that if a board meeting remains civil, and the community is at the microphone during public comment criticizing board/district decisions, threatening to recall or vote them out, that it is fair game whether we agree on their rationale or not. But when it becomes more, it needs to be taken seriously. We have seen what happens when it is not taken seriously.

We need to be mindful of the political ramifications of any action or inaction we take, but we also cannot shy away from every controversial issue. No elected official or public servant should be in physical danger because of the work they do.

**Steven Chapman**  
**Board of Directors, Pacific Region | NSBA**  
**Immediate Past President | ASBA**  
**Immediate Past Chair | NSBA Pacific Region**  
**Past President, Board Member | Tolleson UHSD**



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On Fri, Oct 1, 2021 at 7:54 PM Beverly Slough <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Thank you, John. Very thoughtful analysis of our current situation. I agree - we must do better.

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**From:** John Halkias <[REDACTED]>

**Sent:** Friday, October 1, 2021 10:50:52 PM

**To:** Chip Slaven <[REDACTED]>

**Cc:** 2021-2022 Board of Directors <[REDACTED]>; Elena Kukanova – Carpenter <[REDACTED]>; Francisco Negrón <[REDACTED]>; Jane Mellow <[REDACTED]>; Renee Joe <[REDACTED]>; Kimberly Muse <[REDACTED]>; Patricia Boyd-King <[REDACTED]>

**Subject:** Re: NSBA Letter to President Biden on Threats School Boards Members and Public Schools

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After a challenging week and seeing the responses of some of my fellow board members to this issue, I wanted to think through this more deeply and share my thoughts.

I have no doubt that this was done with the best of intentions and in an attempt to support our members and our schools during this difficult time for us. Many of us have faced challenges these last two years that we have never faced in our history as school board members. It has indeed been difficult, but we have faced them and persevered. We do want the understanding and support of our association for our membership.

However, while I believe the intent was good, unfortunately, instead of helping our members and working to decrease the tensions and hostility that many of us are facing, we seem to have fanned those flames of hostility and division. Rather than helping our cause and calming the waters, this letter has re-awakened hostilities that were just beginning to finally calm down as the things many of us put in place were having a positive effect on student safety, learning, and attendance.

I agree with many of my colleagues that the Board of Directors should have been consulted before a letter like this was sent out publicly, and no less to the President of the United States and the National Press. I also agree that the letter took a stance that went beyond what many of us would consider to be reasonable and used terms that were extreme, and asked for action by the Federal Government that many of us would not request. In fact in a recent press conference, the White House Press Secretary stated that when these incidents occur, it is a matter for local law enforcement and local authorities, and NOT the Federal government. Local control has been a stalwart of our principles, and we do not want to abandon that concept now.

Many of us have been put in a position now of explaining or defending this action of our association as we are asked by members of our community if we consider them domestic terrorists for showing up to our meetings and expressing their opinions. As a Member of this Board, I can defend the intent, but not the approach or much of the tone or content. And it makes me chagrined to have to say that. I have learned in my own state of Ohio that is filled with diverse views that it does me no good to ignore the views of my neighbors and not try to find common ground rather than sow division.

This letter has created a new and renewed firestorm. We have given our loudest critics more ammunition to criticize us. I believe this letter was created unfortunately in the same kind of vacuum that has fueled the recent criticism of this Board and our Association.

We can, and should do better, but we can only do that if we work together and collaborate for our common good rather than acting without our full consent and counsel. We owe that to our association and our membership if we are to continue and succeed.

Sorry for the length of this, but what happened with this letter and the backlash I am seeing has made me reflect on my service on this board to this point, and how we have gone about our business that goes beyond this letter, and has caused me concern. If we don't do better, the very survival and relevance of NSBA is at stake.

John W. Halkias  
Director, Central Region NSBA

Sent from my iPad

On Sep 29, 2021, at 8:18 PM, Chip Slaven <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Good evening,

Attached is a letter President Garcia asked that I share with the board. It was sent to President Biden concerning threats to public schools and school board members. We co-signed the letter which lays out the current issues local school board members are facing and asks for federal cooperation with state and local law enforcement as well as public schools to address these serious issues. It also asks for threat assessments regarding the current situation. Additionally, in talks over the last several weeks with White House staff, they requested additional information on some of the specific threats, so the letter also details many of the incidents that have been occurring.

As you are probably aware, the level of threats and actual violence have increased the last few weeks and there are now some groups recognized for violence showing up at schools and school board meetings. The level of concern is rising. It is hoped the letter will also call out the bad behavior occurring and promote calmer thinking when people are debating these important issues. This letter is embargoed until tomorrow morning when it will be shared publicly. The letter will also be shared this evening with the state association executive directors.

Thank you for all your leadership on your local school board.

Take care,

|

Chip