

Association of Texas Professional Educators

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Supporting Your Freedom to TeachSM

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Bill to protect teachers' personal info heads to House floor

Lawmakers in the House will debate a bill today that would provide extra protection against potential identity theft for thousands of Texas educators.

House Bill 2491, by Rep. Diane Patrick (R-Arlington), would make the personal information of district employees confidential and give such employees the ability to choose, at any time, whether to allow the public to access their personal information.

“At a time when the risk of identity theft is of great concern to all of us, this bill will create a safer work environment for our educators by restricting needless access to their personal information,” said Jennifer Canaday, senior lobbyist for the 112,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators. “By voting for this bill, our elected officials will give school districts a better means to protect their employees and their families from exploitation.”

Under the current statute, the personal information of governmental employees, including that of school employees, is public record by default. Employees may request in writing to “opt out” of public access, but they may only make such requests within the first 14 days of their employment and only with respect to a few categories of information, such as home phone numbers and addresses. Once that initial two-week window closes, the information becomes public record. This law was enacted in 1993 before identity theft became the widespread problem that it is today, and the law has not been amended since 2001.

“While open records requests create a paper trail that lets us know who gains access to personal information, there is no way of ensuring what happens to that information once it leaves the school district or how it will be handled by the requester,” said Canaday.

The new law would make the personal information confidential by default and provide protection to categories of information related to today's technology, such as personal e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers.

While the bill prevents the release of confidential information, it doesn't impede the ability of parents to reach their children's teachers through official channels, such as school telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

“All employees, regardless of their professions, deserve to have their confidential information kept private, and educators are no different,” said Canaday. “Lawmakers, like Rep. Patrick, understand that and are taking necessary steps to ensure this information remains protected.”

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The 112,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators is the largest educators' group in Texas and the largest nonunion educators' group nationwide. Its membership consists of classroom teachers, para-educators, administrators, college students and retired educators. ATPE is committed to advocating for better benefits for all educators, promoting a collaborative work environment and the right of educators to choose the association they feel represents their interests, and providing the best education possible for all Texas school children.