

Subject: Lake Schools Are Not an Outlier – They Are a Warning Signal for Rural Education in Nevada

Dear Senator Titus,

I am writing as a Douglas County resident and parent to ask for your attention and leadership regarding the proposed consolidation or closure of Lake-area schools, including Zephyr Cove Elementary and George Whittell High School.

While this situation is currently framed as a Douglas County School District issue, I want to be very clear: this is not the story of an inefficient outlier community. What is happening in the Lake is a canary in the coal mine for a structural problem affecting rural schools across Nevada.

Douglas County may be the first place where these pressures are forcing acute decisions, but they will not be the last. The same funding mechanics, per-pupil assumptions, geographic constraints, and delayed recognition of district-wide enrollment decline apply to the majority of rural schools in our state.

Our community fully understands that districts are under financial pressure, and we do not deny the need for responsible cost control. What is deeply concerning is the speed, basis, and reliability of the financial information currently being used to justify irreversible decisions that would permanently damage a rural community – and establish a precedent that could be replicated statewide.

Several points are particularly important from a state-level perspective:

First, the financial data being relied upon has already been acknowledged by the District to be flawed. Payroll and pension errors affecting teachers, unanticipated audit findings, and a prolonged absence of a Chief Financial Officer all point to systemic weaknesses in financial controls and forecasting. When those foundations have failed, it is not prudent to move directly to permanent school closures without independent validation of the underlying assumptions.

Second, while a consultant has now been engaged to review the District's finances, I understand that recommendations are being sought by the Nevada Department of Taxation as early as January – weeks into the review and months before its contracted completion. Acting on partial findings midway through a review is not due diligence. It is a rush to judgment that risks locking in permanent outcomes based on incomplete analysis.

Third, the per-pupil funding comparisons being used fundamentally misrepresent rural schools. Lake-area schools have already been consolidated into lean operations. Shared resources appear to be misattributed, capital and operating costs inconsistently treated, and deed restrictions and closure costs excluded. Even if the numbers were perfectly calculated – which they are not – the principle itself is flawed. Per-pupil averages obscure transportation realities, staffing constraints, special education requirements, geographic isolation, and the fact that many assumed “savings” never materialize in practice.

Fourth, the second-order impacts are severe and permanent. Approximately 70% of families in the Lake community have moved here from out of state, many specifically because of these schools. If they close, families will not simply transfer to Valley schools where jobs often do not exist. They will leave Douglas County entirely, most commonly relocating just down the highway to South Lake Tahoe, California. That represents a permanent loss of students, skilled workers, healthcare professionals, local business owners, and long-term taxpayers. The damage to the county's workforce and tax base will far exceed any short-term accounting savings — and this dynamic is not unique to Douglas County.

Finally, it is important to note that this situation is not the result of a sudden collapse in Lake enrollment. Enrollment declined years ago, stabilized, and is now growing. The current financial shock appears driven by district-wide enrollment decline, the end of “hold harmless” funding, and prior mismanagement. Asking Lake schools to absorb disproportionate and irreversible harm from failures not of their making sets a troubling precedent for rural communities across Nevada.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask for your leadership in helping ensure that:

- Irreversible school closure decisions are paused until full, validated financial reviews are complete
- Independent verification of district financial assumptions is required before permanent action
- The long-term impacts on rural workforce retention, enrollment stability, and tax base are fully considered
- State-level policymakers recognise that this is a structural funding and governance issue, not a local inefficiency problem

We are not asking the State to ignore fiscal reality. We are asking for decisions of this magnitude to be grounded in verified data, sound analysis, and a clear understanding of statewide implications — not rushed reactions in the midst of an already acknowledged breakdown in financial oversight.

What happens in the Lake will not stay in the Lake. It will shape how rural schools across Nevada are treated when funding pressures next arise.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state. I would welcome the opportunity to provide any further context that may be helpful.

Respectfully,
James Parker
Douglas County, Nevada