

An Open Letter to the Membership:

When it comes to the capital needs in the Champaign County school districts, the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce membership is in agreement-many of the facilities are aging, many are in great need of improvements and most are not energy efficient.

However, after polling our membership on two separate occasions regarding the November 4 Schools Facility Tax referendum, the membership is clearly divided on how to fund the needed repairs and maintenance of local school facilities. Additionally, a large percentage of the respondents were undecided on the issue. This percentage, if it were reflective of the voting public, is certainly large enough to swing the vote either direction.

The role of the Chamber board of directors is to assess where the membership stands on an issue and then develop positions and actions based on the desire of the membership. The Chamber membership is divided on the issue of the Schools Facility Tax. Therefore, the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce board of directors has opted to neither support nor oppose the referendum. It is extremely important to note though, this is not a neutral position. **It is a position of respect for the differing opinions of the business community on this issue.**

In deference to the differing opinions of our members, we offer both reasons that Champaign County residents should consider supporting this referendum and reasons that residents should consider opposing the referendum on November 4.

Reasons to Cast a "Yes" Vote

- If passed, will provide a guaranteed funding stream for the ongoing maintenance of facilities that are currently paid for by property taxes;
- It may help schools to become more energy efficient and be usable longer;
- There is a potential decrease in property taxes;
- Improved facilities may help with recruitment and retention of quality educators;
- It may help to solve many of the maintenance issues in many of the school districts and lessens the need for schools to seek future referendums;
- It may free up other monies in school districts' budgets that could be applied to educational programming;
- Improved facilities could potentially draw new families resulting in additional workforce talent for other area employers.

Reasons to Cast a "No" Vote

- This is a tax increase, not a tax swap. Property tax abatements are not guaranteed under this law and a sitting school board can not bind future boards to promises they made;
- There is no adequate sunset provision in the legislation. If passed, the additional one cent sales tax will be in place indefinitely;