

# Bill 39

# The Public Schools Amendment Act (Campaign Financing for School Trustees)

April 2025



The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is Manitoba's central labour body, with more than 30 different affiliated unions, representing more than 130,000 unionized workers from every sector and every region of the province in the public and private sectors, as well as the building trades.

We support this bill, as it will ensure greater fairness in school trustee elections and keep big money from influencing local school trustee elections. During the last school trustee elections in 2022, we saw a wealthy Torontonionian – Walter Schroeder – attempt to buy several school trustee seats in Manitoba by donating large amounts of his own wealth to various school trustee candidates. This was allowed because Manitoba's school trustee financing rules are woefully out of date, and out of step with nearly every other jurisdiction in Canada.

A fundamental tenet of our democracy is the value of free and fair elections. And election interference has become a real threat to the functioning of our democracy. For too long, there have essentially been no rules when it comes to school trustee campaign financing in Manitoba, leaving our schools vulnerable to wealthy interests. This is totally out of step with campaign financing rules at the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government, where longstanding rules exist to ensure fair elections that are free from the influence of big money.

We are glad to see the government is following up on its Throne Speech commitment to bring in legislation to prevent third party interference in school trustee elections, the next round of which will occur in Fall 2026. By bringing in individual campaign donation limits and banning corporate and union donations, this bill will bring our provincial school trustee elections in line with elections for other levels of government.

School trustees do important work in our public school system, and it is vital that school trustee elections be decided by Manitoba voters. At a time when democracy is under threat around the world, it is important to take steps to safeguard our democracy here at home.

I want to extend a special thanks to the group Just Elections, a coalition of organizations – including unions – and individuals that are interested in strengthening provincial legislation to promote free and fair school board elections in Manitoba, along with protecting school board elections from election interference. Their advocacy has helped to shape this bill to strengthen democracy at the local school board level.