



## SB 1026

# Testimony Before the Texas Senate Committee on Property Tax

by James Quintero, Director

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is James Quintero, and I am the director of the Think Local Liberty project at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today on [Senate Bill 1026](#). I am here to testify in support of the bill.

As introduced, SB 1026 requires all propositions that seek voter approval for the issuance of bonds or other debt to be submitted on the uniform election date in November. The bill allows for emergency elections to be held on any uniform election date.

Public participation in the election process is a two-way street. It is, of course, citizens' responsibility to exercise their right to vote. However, it is also the government's responsibility to create and maintain an equitable system that allows for maximum involvement, particularly as it relates to major fiscal matters. It is the latter element that is the focus of my remarks today.

The data suggests that more Texans vote in the November election cycle than any other election date. Yet, some of the state's most consequential fiscal decisions are oftentimes put forward at an alternative time.

School districts, in particular, often hold bond elections at off-peak periods seeking approval of public debt. This can result in low voter participation.

Consider the election results from the three largest bond propositions put forward in May 2018:

- Northside ISD got voter approval last year for a bond proposition with a face value of \$849 million. **Of the area's 630,035 registered voters, only 2.74 percent (or 17,256) cast a ballot either For or Against the district's bond proposition.** Of those, only 1.86 percent (or 11,744) voted in support of the measure.
- Denton ISD persuaded voters to approve a \$750.5 million proposition. **Of the 438,864 registered voters, only 2.44 percent (or 10,724) weighed in on this issue** with only 1.82 percent (or 7,980) voting in support of the measure.
- In Royse City ISD, officials sought voter approval of a \$600 million measure. **Of the area's 60,976 registered voters, just 1.81 percent (or 1,106) cast a ballot either For or Against the district's bond proposition.** Only 1.44 percent (or 876) voted in support of the measure.

One final example rooted in 2014, but with possible implications in May 2019.

In May 2014, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD asked voters to approve a \$1.2 billion bond proposition. **Only 5 percent of registered voters turned out to vote for this particular proposal with only about 3 percent of registered voters supporting its passage.** This is noteworthy because later this year Cypress-Fairbanks ISD will be asking voters for another large bond proposition, estimated at \$1.76 billion. Assuming a similar turnout, we can expect that a small minority of voters will exert a tremendous level of influence on such a mammoth single-item proposition.

Consolidating elections on a uniform date in November is imperative as it will ensure that the greatest number of Texas voters have the best opportunity to voice their opinion. Maintaining consistency with uniform elections also ensures that there is higher voter turnout as well as increased likelihood that citizens may be more aware of what they can vote on.

Moreover, holding bond elections at a time when larger voter turnout is expected is common sense, especially given the heightened level of local debt Texas already faces.

For these reasons, we ask that the committee look favorably on SB 1026.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have. ★



**James Quintero** is the director of the Think Local Liberty project at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He's been featured in the *New York Times*, *Forbes*, the *Huffington Post*, Fox News, and Breitbart.

Since joining the Foundation in 2008, Quintero has focused his research efforts on state and local government spending, debt, taxes, financial transparency, annexation, and pension reform. Quintero received a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and an M.P.A. with an emphasis in public finance from Texas State University.

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