

# Petitions call for removal of two members of Leslie School Board

Posted by Claire Cummings | Jackson Citizen Patriot July 29, 2009 23:34PM

Two Leslie School Board members could face a recall election in November if enough residents sign two circulating petitions by Friday.

The recall, organized by John Ghere of Onondaga, targets Pat Fogg and Bill Myers, the most senior members, whose terms expire next year.

"They have pretty well-established control of the school board," said Ghere, 74. "There are ways to save some money, and I think it's appropriate we get some new faces on the board to do that."

Talk of increased class sizes and a vote to privatize custodians are among Ghere's chief concerns.

The petitions each need at least 700 signatures to go on the ballot. Ghere, whose daughter is a Leslie teacher, could not give an official count Wednesday but thinks he will garner enough signatures.

## Who is the EAG?

Education Action Group is a nonprofit that is often critical of unions and believes competition will improve education, according to its Web site, [www.educationactiongroup.org](http://www.educationactiongroup.org).

The Michigan Education Association says the group is run by "Republican Party activist" Kyle Olson. Olson is a former Republican state committee member and now holds no position with any party, said Steve Gunn, EAG's communications director.

EAG does not work on behalf of or receive money from political parties, and does not endorse any candidates, Gunn said. It does not disclose private contributors for fear of harassment, he said.

"The biggest issue is they imply that the people are not happy with the way things are going. I can't find those people," Myers said. "I realize the staff is unhappy; of course they are. But it's tough economic times. We just don't have the money."

Attempts to reach Fogg were unsuccessful.

Who's behind the recall effort is unclear. A nonprofit organization called Education Action Group says the recall is being orchestrated behind the scenes by the Michigan Education Association teachers union, and is a tactic used statewide to intimidate board members who do not vote with MEA's agenda.

But union leaders say the recall effort was initiated by a community unhappy with the board's actions. And Ghere said he started the recall effort well before encountering any union official.

Facing an \$800,000 budget shortfall, the Leslie board voted this year to lay off nine teachers and privatize custodial services, among other cuts.

The petitions allege both Fogg and Myers violated public trust; did not listen to the majority of the community; pushed their own agendas; refused to negotiate in good faith with teachers who have not had a new contract in two years; serve the interests of anti-union groups; believe in privatization as a cost-saving measure; and want to lay off teachers, resulting in increased class sizes, as published in the Leslie Weekly Guardian.

The wording does not have to be true, just clear, according to the Ingham County Clerk's Office.

"There's no obligation for them to prove that those allegations are true," Myers said. "And quite honestly, I don't believe they are."

Myers, who is serving his 14th year on the board, said the board had to find money to balance the budget. The custodians rejected a proposal in May from the district that called for pay cuts so the board privatized services, which had less of an impact on classrooms, he said.

At a February conference in Detroit, the MEA held a session called "I brought you into this world and I can take you out! — How to run a successful board recall campaign," according to the MEA's Web site.

"We think it's disgusting they would be willing to humiliate, intimidate and remove honest and hardworking school board members just because those school board members don't vote the way they want them to vote," Steve Gunn, Education Action Group's communications director, said of the MEA.

William Derr, chief negotiator for the Leslie Education Association, said the recall was not initiated and is not driven by his union. Ghere, who organized a recall effort 20 years ago, said it was his idea.

"The MEA does not suggest to its locals that they initiate recall campaigns," MEA spokesman Doug Pratt said Wednesday. "That is a decision that is made at the local level between school employees, parents and the broader community."

Pratt said the MEA believes in the democratic process and "holding elected officials accountable."

A special election could be called if the issues do not make it on the November ballot. That would cost the district \$10,000, Finance Director Scott Blankinship said.

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