

GUEST COMMENTARY

Open state's courts

It is time to begin opening child abuse and neglect proceedings within the Commonwealth's juvenile and family courts to public view. Kentucky's Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel, for a second year, has made this recommendation to Kentucky's legislature.

This also marks the second consecutive year Sen. Julie Raque Adams (R-Louisville) proposed legislation to allow the creation of a small number of presumptively open court pilot sites in Kentucky. The intent of this legislation, as stated in the Panel's 2015 report, is to promote "transparency, accountability and systems improvement."

Sen. Adam's proposal, Senate Bill 40 (SB 40), through the use of a pilot project, creates a measured and thoughtful approach to identifying and refining best practices and allows the Kentucky Supreme Court to develop appropriate rules before implementation in every affected court.

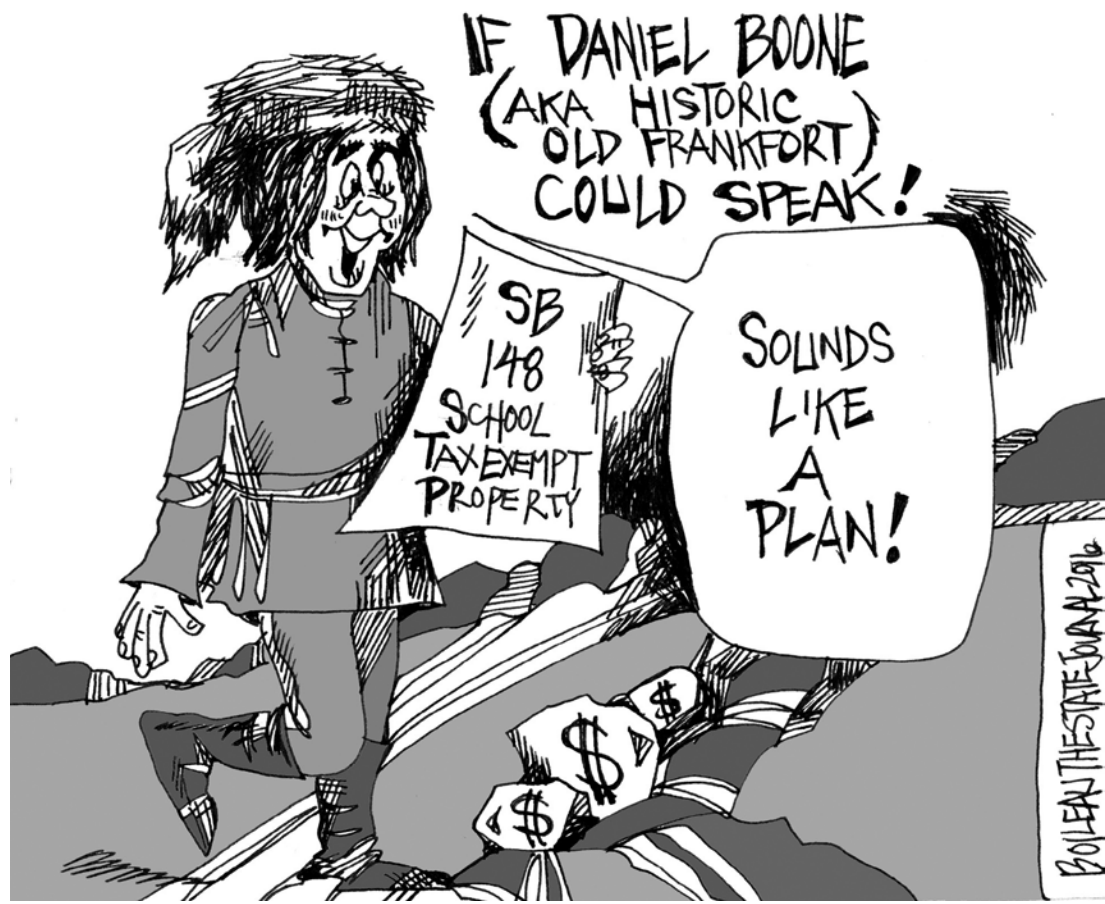
The language in SB 40, as well as the use of a studied pilot approach, will help assure an effective balance of the public's interest in transparency and protecting the child's best interest. It is important to note SB 40 excludes all child sexual abuse cases and prohibits the use of recording equipment in juvenile court proceedings.

The panel made the recommendation to allow greater openness of child abuse and neglect court cases only after much study, discussion and review of best practice recommendations. The primary reason for the panel's recommendation was findings from actual case reviews. The panel has identified missed opportunities for prevention among nearly all agencies — the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, medical and mental health providers, law enforcement and the court system. We believe increased openness within the court system will promote greater public understanding of the impact of child abuse, improve confidence in our court and child welfare system, and promote greater accountability for those agencies responsible for the wellbeing of our children. It is worthy to note, Kentucky is in the minority of states maintaining the current level of secrecy. Current practice in the Commonwealth is also contrary to the recommended policy of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

SB 40 would bring the Commonwealth closer to national best practice recommendations.

I encourage the General Assembly to enact SB 40.

Submitted by Judge Roger Crittenden (Ret.), chair of the Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel.



GUEST EDITORIAL

SB 148 could help equalize funding for city schools

Our state senator and former Gov. Julian Carroll, has filed Senate Bill 148 (SB 148), which is important to the capital city of Kentucky and, we believe, to all of Kentucky's leaders. SB 148 helps the Frankfort Independent School District toward its responsibility to drive the revitalization of the Old City of Frankfort.

A vibrant, scenic capital city presents Kentucky as a place of prosperity, rich history and unequalled beauty.

The Old City of Frankfort is anchored by both state capitol buildings and includes two governor's mansions, historic churches, an historic cemetery and homes of Kentucky's earliest leaders. These are Frankfort's landmarks and a source of pride to all of us in this school district. But these landmarks pose an enormous financial challenge to leaders of the Frankfort Independent School District.

All of these properties are exempt from property taxes, the single most important means by which a school district raises its operational funds. Only 25 percent of property in the Old City can be taxed.

The other 75 percent of all Old City property is owned by government, churches, educational institutions or non-profits. Each year, the district loses millions of dollars in revenue because of tax-exempt property.

This year, the total loss in property taxes at Frankfort Independent's current rate of taxation is more than \$6 million; the loss in only state-owned property is \$4.8 million.

SB 148 would allow a school district with 60 percent of tax exempt property within its borders an adjustment in the state SEEK appropriation. For the Frankfort school district this would be an additional \$700,000 per year, which would be a significant contribution toward the district's ability to serve its students.

Frankfort Independent is, so far, the only school district identified as meeting the 60-percent threshold, but it is not the only school district to lose revenue from tax-exempt property.

What makes us unique is the concentration of tax-exempt property that cuts deeply into commercial and population centers.

The History Center and the Transportation Cabinet both replaced large tracts of commercial property.

At the current rate of taxation, the district loses \$31,314 in revenue each year compared to the pre-existing taxable property that was replaced.

Unlike the city and county, there are no occupational taxes from workers who com-

mute into the community. There is no other compensation for tax-exempt property for the school district.

We have been asked a number of relevant questions about this situation. For example, has the board of education done enough to raise local taxes before asking for state assistance?

Frankfort is in the top 20 percent in property tax rates among all school districts. Clearly, we are not going to be able to tax ourselves out of the problem given the size of the challenge, even with the generous support our community gives.

We have been asked whether the answer is to merge with the county school system. This would merely be passing the problem to the county.

And it would mean giving up an important choice in public education for this community and for the several counties around, since Frankfort is the only small public school system among the contiguous counties.

It is also necessary to understand the importance of this school system to the state capital itself.

This small, neighborhood-centered school system is the perfect companion for the Old City, with its extraordinary sense of community.

When the educational program is strong, the school district is the magnet for attracting young families who are able and willing to maintain these 100-year-old houses and preserve the historic environs of the State Capitol Building and Kentucky's most historic landmarks.

How this school system fares significantly affects how the capital city will present Kentucky to the world.

It is our absolute goal that this school system will play its vital role for the capital city. Frankfort's new superintendent, Dr. Houston Barber, is a superintendent with vision, drive and an understanding of this district's part in the Frankfort economy.

He has put together a dynamic leadership team to move the district forward.

The General Assembly has always been generous with school districts. We know that Kentucky's legislators would not want their capital city's school system to be so disadvantaged simply because it is the state capital.

Let's pass SB 148.

Submitted by Jina Greathouse, Paul Looney, Libby Marshall and Margaret Tillman, members of the Frankfort Independent Board of Education.

BOWLING GREEN DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL

Presidential candidates should rise above immature mudslinging

Candidates running for any office should conduct themselves professionally and not act like schoolchildren having temper tantrums.

All too often, we see in election cycle after election cycle candidates brutally attacking one another — in some cases, attacking their families — instead of talking about what the people really care about, which are issues such as the economy and national security.

Candidates who play these attack games are committing a disservice to those who they hope will help propel them into office.

In the presidential race, candidates are vying to be the leader of the free world. They should always conduct themselves in a professional manner, whether during debates, interviews with the press or on the campaign trail.

Unfortunately, as in previous presidential campaigns, we are seeing more of the same from the candidates, both Republican and Democrat. In fairness, the two Democratic candidates, Hillary Clinton and U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., have taken a few jabs at each other, but overall have both run relatively positive campaigns. That may change, though, as that contest has become closer than initially expected.

The same can't be said about the Republican candidates, with the exception of Ben Carson, who hasn't lowered himself to attacking and instead sticks to the issues facing this country.

The issues our country is facing are significant and scary in many ways. But watching the debates, hearing the candidates on different talk shows and reading about them in newspapers, you would honestly think that they are kids arguing on the playground rather than running for the highest office in the land.

While the debates and day-to-day campaigning have featured some serious and enlightening discussions, they have also seen way too much name calling and personal attacks.

It's absolutely ridiculous.

Whoever is the eventual Republican nominee is going to come out against the eventual Democratic nominee pretty bruised after all of the infighting.

We would be naive to believe that arguing and accusation slinging doesn't happen in presidential debates. Sure it does, but this election cycle it appears to have come to an all-time high.

The voters of this country, regardless of who they are supporting, deserve much better than what they are seeing from the field of Republican candidates.

We know the childish behavior will likely continue and that really is unfortunate, but we would just like to urge the candidates to talk about the serious issues we face as a country and leave the childish behavior to the kids on the playground.

This commentary initially appeared in the Bowling Green Daily News.

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The State Journal (USPS 520-160) is published daily, Monday through Friday afternoon and on Sunday mornings by Frankfort Newsmedia LLC, 1216 Wilkinson Blvd., Frankfort, Kentucky, 40601. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The State Journal, P.O. Box 368, Frankfort, KY 40602. Volume 20, Issue 280.

State Journal subscription rates: Monthly by carrier, \$12.00. Mail subscription, three months, \$70.00; six months, \$140.00; 12 months, \$280.00.

For home delivery call the circulation department at 227-4556. Periodical postage paid at Frankfort, Kentucky 40601.

Unclaimed credit balances will be forwarded to our Newspaper in Education Program.