



HJR 129

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Path to full text:

<https://documents.house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills261/hlrbillspdf/5293H.01I.pdf>

Quick Snapshot

What HJR 129 does (plain English):

HJR 129 puts a *constitutional amendment* on the ballot to raise the **maximum debt** that a school district can carry from **15% to 20%** of the value of taxable tangible property in the district (based on the last assessment). All other local governments (counties, cities, towns, etc.) stay at the existing 5% cap. The existing supermajority vote requirements for local bond elections (four-sevenths or two-thirds, depending on the election date) stay the same.

Net effect: It doesn't *force* new debt, but it **invites** significantly more school bond debt and the higher property taxes needed to repay it.

Initial Act for Missouri stance:

👉 **Oppose.** It moves the constitutional guardrail *in the wrong direction* by expanding the government's ability to indebted families, rather than tightening or reforming the system.

2. What Exactly Changes?

2.1 Title & Stated Purpose

The resolution's heading and opening lines say it is:

“...submitting to the qualified voters of Missouri an amendment repealing Section 26(b) of Article VI of the Constitution of Missouri, and adopting one new section in lieu thereof, relating to indebtedness of school districts.”

So the title is **narrow and specific**: it flags that this is about *school district debt limits* in the state constitution.

2.2 Constitutional Text

Section 26(b), Article VI deals with how much **local governments**, including school districts, may become indebted with voter approval. HJR 129 repeals and reenacts that section.

Key operative sentence in the reenacted section:

“Any county, city, incorporated town or village or other political corporation or subdivision of the state... may become indebted in an amount not to exceed five percent of the value of taxable tangible property... **except that a school district ... may become indebted in an amount not to exceed [fifteen] twenty percent** of the value of such taxable tangible property.”

So:

- **Counties, cities, towns, etc.:**
 - Remain capped at **5%** of assessed taxable tangible property.
- **School districts:**
 - Cap rises from **15% → 20%**.

The voting thresholds for the bond elections remain:

- **Four-sevenths** approval if the bond question is on:
 - General municipal election day,
 - A primary election, or
 - A general election.
- **Two-thirds** approval at **all other elections**.

Those voting rules are already in the Constitution; HJR 129 carries them forward without changing them.

3. Single-Subject, Title Honesty, and Scope

3.1 Single-Subject / Clear Title (Art. III §23 lens)

Even though this is a **constitutional amendment** (not a bill changing statute), we still apply the same lens:

- **Subject:** Indebtedness of political subdivisions *as it relates to school districts' debt cap*.
- **Actual change:** Only the school-district percentage moves (15 → 20).
- **No extra riders:** It does not sneak in unrelated changes (no tax policy, no education standards, etc.).

Title specificity:

- “Relating to indebtedness of school districts” matches what is actually being changed.

- The fact that the section also *mentions* other local entities doesn't create a hidden second subject because their cap isn't being touched.

From a **single-subject and title-honesty** standpoint, this is acceptable and not an "omnibus" Trojan horse.

4. Delegation, Separation of Powers, and Local Control

- **No new boards or commissions.**
HJR 129 doesn't create or empower any unelected body.
- **Who gains power?**
 - **Local school boards** gain **more room** to propose larger bond packages.
 - Voters still have to approve individual bond issues under the supermajority thresholds.
- **Local control vs. fiscal restraint:**
 - On paper, voters retain control: no debt without a supermajority.
 - In practice, raising the cap strengthens the hand of school administrators, bond underwriters, and construction interests statewide, who will now have a bigger constitutional ceiling to point to when pushing "we need this now" bond campaigns.

From a **limited-government and separation-of-powers** perspective, this doesn't centralize power in Jefferson City—but it **weakens a key constitutional restraint** on local governmental debt.

5. Impact on Missouri Families & Property Owners

5.1 Property Taxes & Long-Term Debt

School bond debt is repaid primarily through **property taxes**. Raising the constitutional ceiling to 20% allows:

- **Larger bond issues** per district,
- **Longer-term debt loads**, or
- **Stacking multiple bond projects** before hitting a cap.

While the resolution itself does **not** raise any specific tax rate, it clearly **expands the capacity** to borrow against homeowners' property and future tax revenue.

Effects on families:

- **Higher potential tax burdens, especially on:**
 - Seniors on fixed incomes,
 - Young families trying to keep or purchase a home,
 - Small business owners who pay property tax on buildings, land, or equipment.
- **Intergenerational impact:**
 - Bond debt can lock in payments for decades.
 - Children and grandchildren may still be paying for projects passed years earlier, even if the buildings are outdated by then.

From a stewardship perspective, this is a **move toward more government debt, not less.**

5.2 Education & Capital Projects

Supporters will argue:

- Schools need more capacity to:
 - Renovate or build buildings,
 - Upgrade safety and technology,
 - Expand facilities to handle growth.

Our criteria, however, ask:

- Does it **protect families' wallets** or expose them to higher long-term burdens?
- Does it **discipline the government** or make it easier to grow?

On balance, HJR 129:

- **Makes it easier** to load more debt onto local taxpayers.
- Leaves existing accountability tools (local votes) in place, but with a **higher ceiling** and therefore **higher risk**.

6. Core Principles Check

1. Sanctity of life / Equal protection

- Neutral—no direct life issues.

2. Biblical view of government

- Scripture warns that “the borrower is servant to the lender.”

- Raising government debt limits moves *away* from prudence and restraint and **toward** heavier long-term obligations on citizens.

3. Constitutionalism & fiscal restraint

- This is a **constitutional amendment that weakens a fiscal guardrail** (the 15% cap).
- No offsetting reforms (transparency, sunset clauses, or tighter definitions of allowable projects) are included.

4. Property rights & economic freedom

- More debt capacity → more pressure for bond campaigns → higher property taxes to service that debt.
- That is **negative** for property owners and small businesses.

5. Local control & subsidiarity

- Local voters still have a strong voice, which is good.
- However, the statewide constitutional cap exists for a reason—to protect taxpayers from political and industry pressure. Raising it across the state **tilts the playing field** toward bigger, more expensive projects.

6. No surveillance, no woke standards, no federal strings

- HJR 129 is clean on those fronts; it's purely about debt limits.

Overall alignment:

- **Supports** local voter control (procedurally).
- **Conflicts** with our priorities for fiscal restraint and protection of taxpayers.

7. Red Flags & Possible Improvements

7.1 Red Flags

1. Higher Debt Ceiling: 15% → 20%

- Location: Section 26(b) text.
- Impact: Significantly more borrowing capacity, with no added protections for taxpayers.
- Severity: **High** (core fiscal-policy concern).

2. No Companion Reforms

- No added requirements for:

- Transparency on total district indebtedness,
- Independent audits before bond elections,
- Limits on non-essential or non-instructional projects.

- This is a **pure expansion** of capacity, not a reform package.

7.2 Hypothetical Fixes (If Someone Insisted on Changing the Cap)

How about we reduce the school-district debt cap to 10%. That would be a move in the right direction, at least.

8. Final Recommendation

Given that HJR 129:

- Leaves the **voter approval mechanism** intact (good),
- But **raises the school-district debt cap** from 15% to 20% with **no corresponding taxpayer protections** (bad),
- Moves constitutional policy **toward more government debt** rather than less,
- And increases the long-term risk of **higher property-tax burdens** on Missouri families,

Act for Missouri OPPOSES HJR 129.

We can acknowledge the need for sound school facilities while still insisting that the constitutional response should be **better stewardship and discipline**, not a higher debt limit for local government.