

Testimony on House Bill 512

Ohio House of Representatives Government Accountability and Oversight
Committee
Representative Louis W. Blessing III, Chair

Dr. Dan E. Krane,
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Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and Committee members, my name is Dan Krane and I am a professor of Biological Sciences (with an affiliate appointment in Computer Science) at Wright State University. I also have the honor of serving as the Chair of the Ohio Faculty Council which represents the faculty at all of the four-year public universities in the State of Ohio. Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today to give a faculty perspective on House Bill 512.

I would like to start by reminding your committee that first and foremost the Ohio Faculty Council is committed to supporting and bringing attention to the critical role that Ohio's institutions of higher education play in revitalizing the economy of the State and the nation by attracting and training an educated workforce.

The Ohio Faculty Council understands that HB 512 would consolidate the Ohio Department of Education, Ohio Department of Higher Education and the Office of Workforce Transformation into a single Department of Learning and Achievement. We agree that more coordination between the State's educational departments would be beneficial to our students. However, we oppose HB 512 because the decisions that would lead to better alignment of the educational and career training opportunities to help both traditional and working adult students should be made by educators and elected officials, not by a political appointee and through the creation of another layer of bureaucracy.

HB 512 would give an unprecedented amount of power to one political appointee while marginalizing the role of the State Board of Education and Regents. Education should not be a political issue. Educators and elected officials who have a responsibility to represent their constituents should run education in Ohio, not bureaucrats. We can count on educators to keep the success of our students a higher priority than those of special interests.

Combining agencies doesn't remove inefficiencies – it creates them. It hinders local flexibility and makes it harder to hold education officials accountable. It also makes it harder for the constituent parts to effectively share their perspectives with policy makers.

What Ohio needs is a stable learning environment and commitment to a long-term investment in education at all levels, especially higher education. Rapid changes in public education policy that have been mandated by the Ohio General Assembly over the past decade have been counterproductive and frustrating to educators at all levels. State support for higher education in Ohio has fallen at a faster rate than it has in most other states over the past 10 years. Public universities are primarily funded by two sources: 1) tuition and fees, and 2) state support. The split between these two sources across the US averages 50%. But, at 37%, Ohio's state support of higher education is now well below the national average. Higher education expenditures make up just 4% of Ohio's total expenditures – one-third the national average. We expect that the reorganization proposed in HB 512 would make it even harder for higher education to get the attention and the support that is needed for it to revitalize the State's economy.

The Ohio Faculty Council is also concerned that the creation of the mega-bureaucracy proposed in HB 512 will lead to a further blurring of the distinction between K-12 and college/university faculty. Community colleges are a tremendously important resource for many kinds of students: non-traditional students who are not looking for a bachelor's degree or who need to re-establish their readiness for academic work; students who want to pursue more technical fields and only need an associate's degree, or who need to improve their preparation in various areas before moving to a four-year institution; or students who are not sure what degree they ultimately want and need low-cost way to fulfill broad general education requirements, among others. What community colleges, let alone high schools, are not prepared to do as well is to offer the full range of specialized, advanced courses that make up a high-quality baccalaureate degree. It would be hugely inefficient for such institutions to hire within the specializations and at the qualification levels that four-year institutions must maintain for accreditation purposes. We celebrate the idea of exposing the best and brightest high school students in Ohio to college-level courses but note that there are good reasons for the state to concentrate its investment in specialized facilities (e.g. sophisticated and expensive laboratory space and equipment) and personnel at universities that are physically and administratively distinct from other aspects of education in the state.

Chair Blessing and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share with you a university faculty perspective on HB 512. Improved alignment of the educational and career training opportunities to help both traditional and working adult students succeed is a conversation worth having. But the mega-agency that would be created by HB 512 would make it even harder for public higher education in Ohio to get the attention and the support that is needed to

attract and retain an educated citizenry that are essential for the State's economy in the 21st century. I would welcome any questions you might have for me or the Ohio Faculty Council.