

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Rebecca Berry, and I thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the hearing in opposition to House Bill 512. I know that HB 512 is a large bill, some 2,400 pages, and that some in favor of it would like to dismiss concerns as “hyperbole” or disregard projected downsides as “nothing further from the truth.” However, it is my hope and expectation that you will weigh each testimony fairly, and hear what each voice is saying. It is also my hope that while I am new to engaging in the political process like this, that my voice will be clear.

I agree that there are flaws in the existing system, communication pitfalls, and legislature that doesn't quite make sense as it works out in the real world. However, I cannot agree that HB 512 is the best way to address those shortcomings. By appointing one director, beholden only to the governor, in charge of educational policy, our districts and laws are open for drastic change whenever the administration changes. This opens the door for dramatic changes not only in public school education, but also home education. Any bill which seeks to fix the existing problems needs to be structured in a way to provide checks and balances so that the liberties of all Ohioans are protected. As it stands, there is no such provision in HB 512. It may be tempting to dismiss this concern as exaggeration, or point back to the flawed system, or to the ignorance of the public. Yet, I implore you to understand that further removing the voice of Ohio citizens from the equation can easily allow politicians and lawmakers too distant from the problems “in the field” to create policies that do not work. If our voices aren't being heard now, perhaps it is better to discuss how to better engage constituents, *and* how to keep representatives and lawmakers accountable to those they represent. It should be noted that I emailed fourteen people regarding HB 512 and did not receive a single response. With all respect, this is unacceptable.

Additionally, I am concerned about the rhetoric of “cradle to career”. Allow me to be candid, I didn't have my children for them to be shaped by the state for a workforce, and neither did anyone I know. Yes, I want my children to grow up to be educated, productive, contributing members of society. It is my opinion that this is best achieved by teaching children to be flexible, to be critical thinkers, to be creative dreamers (after all, who is going to create these jobs that don't exist yet that HB 512 aims to prepare them for?), and to love learning.

If we want trainable adults, we need to have children that enjoy learning new skills and new information. If we want a dynamic workforce, we need to have children that look forward to attending schools, co-ops, apprenticeships, and so on. If we want to see life and growth in Ohio's economy and employment opportunities, we need to have children whose curiosity is fed instead of squelched, whose imaginations are encouraged to soar instead of stifled. We need to teach children to work hard, and not simply perform for tests and achievements.

It is not only my opinion but my first-hand experience in the public school system that imposing an agenda and standards on children at a young age does not allow for these things to happen. Instead, our smallest students develop anxiety and stress disorders, and have grown to have open

disdain for learning by middle school. Those who support HB 512 talk about 8th graders choosing career tracks so they can be gainfully employed upon high school graduation. I fully support this track *if* the student really desires it. However, the fourteen year olds in my life are still figuring out who they are and discovering the wide world of possibility around them. They should be allowed this freedom. They should be given a smorgasbord of opportunity; not career tracks. The language of “cradle to career” smacks of conveyor belt education, and is a presumptuous overreach of the government.

It is evident to me that HB 512 aims to align education standards with the needs of the workforce. Again, I readily support preparing students to be gainfully employed as well as offering college prep opportunities. Four year degrees certainly aren't the only path to a successful career. My concern is in making education so standardized that we're removing critical and creative thinking, and in making education merely about the workforce. Maybe it is because I graduated with a liberal arts degree (cum laude BGSU graduate, class of 2007, and proud member of Phi Beta Kappa), but I do not believe that education is all about what we want to be when we grow up. Instead, education should also encourage students to think about what they want to change in the world when they grow up, what they want to create, and what they want to contribute. Some of the most important Americans, and Ohioans, achieved great things for our country because they weren't limited to a single career path, and their thirst for learning was not diminished. If we want to produce more John Glens, Toni Morrisons, Thomas Edisons, Wright Brothers, William McKinleys, or any other of the many influential Ohioans, we need to offer students variety in their educational choices. As tempting as it may be for some to create a single arc that safely brings students from “birth to workforce”, it shouldn't be done. It imposes too much from the state.

In conclusion, I respectfully request that this committee carefully consider the implications of HB 512. There must be a simpler way to address the existing issues in both the education system, and in the faulty constituent-representative relationship that some are trying to leverage in support of HB 512. I urge you to consider the long term effects of “cradle to career” policies, and see not just the needs of the workforce, but the needs of the human beings who call themselves Ohioans. I particularly implore you to consider the liberties of all Ohioans, be they students, public school administrators and educators, or home educators. Please draft a bill that will protect and support us all as we endeavor to raise the next generation to work hard and make a difference in our great state. Thank you for your time.