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Chairman Blessing, Vice-Chairman Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and honorable members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee; thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to HB 512.

My name is Sarah Fowler and I am currently serving my sixth year as an elected member of the Ohio State Board of Education, representing over 1.1 million people across six counties in Northeastern Ohio. I am speaking on my own behalf and that of my constituents, not as a representative of the board as a whole.

My fundamental concern with HB 512 is the transfer of all education policy and regulatory authority from a State Board of Education that has elected representation to an unelected and therefore unaccountable mega-agency and governor appointed director of the proposed Department of Learning and Achievement. This massive shift affects the daily operations of every form of PK-12 education in the state: traditional public school, private school, religious school, home school, community school, and career tech. It expands big government bureaucracy by eliminating transparency and accountability throughout the rule making process. HB 512 is a direct attack on Ohio families and would negatively impact every student in the state.

What makes the mega-agency proposed in HB 512 non-transparent and unaccountable?

Currently all PK-12 education regulations are created and regularly reviewed in a public rule making process through the State Board of Education (comprised of 11 elected members and 8 appointed by the Governor.) These regulations include everything that touches the daily experience of a student including academic standards and assessments, building, health and safety standards, transportation, and teacher and administrator qualifications, to name a few. The regulatory process is governed by laws passed in the legislature, public input, and the decision of the state board.¹ Parents, teachers, and stakeholders have multiple opportunities to present thoughts or concerns regarding any regulation to the board and have an expectation that they will be heard and considered. If the desired action is not considered or taken they have a direct line of accountability through the election process. Under the proposed legislation, the new mega-agency becomes responsible for overseeing the daily regulation of all PK-12 education, career tech and higher education under one director appointed by the Governor. There is no way of holding the director or agency employees accountable to the voters for the regulations passed. Sure, they might vote out the governor but who is to say that would be in response to the education policy changes?!

The proposed legislation takes Ohio back to the early 1900's when the governor appointed our state superintendents for four year terms. Over the 41 years that the governor appointed system was tried, the people of this state found that the education environment became unstable, political, and

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inconsistent in its vision and expectations for students. Sixty-five years ago, in 1953, the people of the State of Ohio determined that they wanted to separate education policy from the political control of the governor's office and establish a separate entity, the State Board of Education, to direct education policy.

Nearly every governor since the creation of the State Board of Education has opposed the board's independence of the administration, Governor Voinovich even succeeded in adding eight appointed members to a previously all elected board. However, the original intent of the constitutional amendment was to separate the State Board from administrative political agendas, to provide consistency and continuity for local districts, and to oversee education policy at the state level with accountability to the voters.

HB 512 undermines our constitutional separation of powers, transparency of the rule making process, and accountability to the voters for regulations created by the proposed mega-agency. This legislation is not "a homeschool thing" or "a public school thing" - it negatively impacts EVERY form of education in Ohio: traditional public school, private school, Christian/religious schools, home education, community schools, and career tech. The daily operating standards (ie. teacher/student ratios, teacher/principal evaluation systems, report cards, state academic standards, state assessments for students, assessments for teacher licensure, proficiency levels, and licensing requirements, etc are all currently determined through a public rule making process. These functions would become non-transparent through the transfer of authority to an unelected, unaccountable AGENCY rather than the current State Board of Education. All education policy making functions would be further bureaucratized and no longer created through a transparent, accountable process!

Other Responsibilities of the State Board of Education

I have also heard proponents of the bill suggest that the State Board of Education is irrelevant. Aside from the important regulatory functions of the board already mentioned, as an elected board member, I receive numerous phone calls and e-mails from constituents requesting help on a variety of education issues. As a state board of education member it is my responsibility to delve deeply into state education policy and to offer support and answers when possible. During my time on the board constituents have contacted me on numerous issues, ranging from the age of compulsory attendance to bullying, assisting children with special needs, applying for College Credit Plus, questions on how to home school or to find local school board information, concerns with state standards, questions about assessments their child must take, proficiency scores, report cards, safety, bussing, funding, consolidation, teacher evaluation, licensure, and graduation requirements, to name just a few. State Board of Education members serve as an education liaison to their constituents just as your offices offer assistance on healthcare, business, and government when requested. We have the ability to meet locally, to provide information and to help families navigate the sometimes stressful challenges of ensuring each child has access to a quality

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education. I am a source of accessible information and assistance in a way that the governor, his appointed director, or state agency employees are not able to be by nature of the position.

Opposed to Big Brother Assigning Kids Jobs

Additionally, HB 512 is the antithesis of the American dream. Instead of providing a basic education that allows every student to pursue their God-given talents and vocational dreams, the bill emphasizes streamlining a birth to work and cradle to career pipeline. Children are not widgets and cannot be programmed as such! The basic concept that every child is unique and that each should have the freedom to pursue their own aspirations outside of elitist societal engineering is the concept that has allowed America to flourish when many other nations stagnated. It is un-American to prescribe the career path a child must follow and this bill establishes the framework for government controlled workforce placement under neatly disguised "workforce development" language.

In summary, HB 512 **increases the size and scope of government** by creating one mega-agency comprehensive of the Ohio Department of Education, the Department of Higher Education and the Office of Workforce Transformation into a new mega-agency known as the Ohio Department of Learning and Achievement.

HB 512 **removes accountability** to Ohio voters for state level education policy decisions by allowing the governor to appoint one agency director rather than utilizing the current model of elected/appointed State Board of Education members which are responsive and accountable to the voters of their region.

HB 512 **eliminates transparency** by removing all policy making authority from the elected/appointed State Board of Education and transferring all education regulatory authority into the labyrinth of the mega-agency itself. This eliminates the opportunity for public participation on proposed changes to existing regulations and accountability for decisions made.

I respectfully ask this committee to vote down and kill a bill that would negatively impact the education of every student in Ohio. Protect the voice of Ohio families in the most important responsibility they have - that of educating their children. Do not send regulatory authority to an unelected, unaccountable agency that may be unresponsive to the challenges of any particular education choice. Keep the constitutional separation of powers for the protection of all students and families in Ohio.

Thank you for your time, I am happy to answer any questions from members of the committee.