

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Sarah Riley from Springfield and I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony today in opposition to HB 512.

I currently am home educating my two public school-age children and plan on home educating my youngest when he reaches compulsory age. Prior to this, however, I have had the privilege to teach Ohio's children in the public school system for 16 years. Thirteen of those years were in a brick and mortar building and the other three were through a virtual school. I have taught in grades 1-5 and grade 7 in both rural and inner-city schools. I have taught in schools where many children came from affluent families and in schools where very few children came from families that weren't poverty-stricken. I have taught children of all races, some of whom do not speak English as their primary language and students of varying ability levels. I believe I can say that I have a very good understanding of Ohio's students. I loved my time teaching, but it was the bureaucracy, large amounts of high-stakes testing, developmentally inappropriate state standards and the ever revolving door of changes in educational policy that started pushing me out. The final push was when I saw my own children starting to lose the love of learning that they once possessed. While they had amazing teachers, I could not idly sit by and watch my children become victims to public education. As a teacher, I could no longer be asked to teach concepts to children who were not developmentally ready to learn those concepts. I could not watch my students crumble in anxiety over district and state tests any longer. I was not able to do what I loved to do—teach. I agree with many that Ohio's educational system is broke and that we are seeing much of this play out in our workforce. I also agree that something needs to be done. However, I do not see HB 512 as the answer to this issue.

I understand that HB 512 itself does not directly change current educational policies, but as it is written, HB 512 allows for the creation of the Department of Learning and Achievement (DLA). The Director, chosen by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate, will then appoint other assistant directors as the department sees necessary and an attempt at consolidating almost all education policy decision making into one new agency will be made. The creation of this department will take power away from the ones who are directly elected by Ohio's constituents and will give it to a person who is appointed by the governor. The creation of this department defeats the built-in checks and balances that keeps our government from giving too much power to one person or one group of people and allowing them to control policies based on their political persuasions and ideals. As a home educating parent I prefer the rules related to home education managed by an agency that is supervised by directly elected officials. The fact that this department can enact policies that change how I choose to home educate my children is alarming to me. What alarms me most is that the appointed persons could make changes depending on how they view home education. Depending on the views of the governor and his/her appointee, changes could be made that

would infringe on my ability to educate my children as I see fit. I do not want the government dictating what I teach my children, when I teach it, or how I teach it.

While the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Education will still be in existence, the rule-making authority regarding some of the existing powers and duties of the aforementioned are transferred to the DLA. Giving one department the ability to make rules and/or policies from “crib to career” is quite an overreach of my parental authority. While I fully understand that this terminology is meant to address the need to encourage conversations between the workforce and schools, I believe that creating one centralized department will not achieve this. Ohio is a unique state in that it is diverse, not only races, but also the types of work available in the different parts of the state. How can one department be tasked with the enormous responsibility of knowing what employers in different parts of the state need? The needs of employers in and around Cleveland or other large cities will be drastically different than the employers’ needs in southeast Ohio. A better answer would be to incentivize employers within local school districts to reach into the schools and offer apprenticeships, career classes, and to start conversations with the schools to develop a plan to help students transition from high school to college or into the workforce. However, to have one department decide how this would look state-wide would open up opportunities for students to begin to be placed into “tracks” depending on what their end employment goal would be. Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, did you know when you were in upper elementary, middle, or high school what you would end up choosing for your career path? I’m sure many of you were like me and changed your mind over and over again. Over the course of 6 years, I wanted to be an astronaut, a farmer, a forensic scientist, a coroner, and a large animal veterinarian. As you already heard, I ended up pursuing a career in education. Had teachers or a school decided what kinds of classes I needed to take while in 7-12 grade based on what I thought I wanted to be, I wonder if I would have ended up choosing a career that I was called to be in? I don’t believe it is in the best interest of Ohio to allow the state government to control, at worst, or have a say in at best, what her children will grow up to be. The years prior to compulsory age belong to the parent. The years during elementary belong to the parent. The years during middle and high school belong to the parent. We, the parents, are the ones that should be allowed to speak into these areas, not the government.

HB 512 and the creation of a centralized education department is not the answer to Ohio’s educational and workforce woes. While I appreciate that the writer and the co-sponsors of this bill are attempting to address this, I feel that this bill will cause more changes and weaken the educational process each time a new governor is elected or the control of the senate changes hands. Ohio’s teachers, both public and non, parents, students, and constituents deserve for something to be done, but HB 512 is not it.

Thank you for your time today and for your service to our great state.