

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reinke, ranking member Clyde and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Amanda Sillin, I am the Executive Director of Excellence in Learning Community Cooperative in Newark, Ohio. I live in Zanesville, Ohio and I am here to testify in opposition to HB512.

I must apologize in advance, my testimony will largely follow my notes, however I sincerely doubt my testimony will be read or word for word what is submitted here.

My first concern about HB512 is similar to the concerns that I heard voiced last week. In my testimony last week I agreed, this bill does nothing to change the existing statues, it merely consolidates power. However, upon further review I have found that in addition to consolidating power behind a curtain of bureaucracy, it also adds almost limitless power for this new agency. A few changes give me serious concerns. Changes like (pg, section) which state (quote massive power given) These types of statements have no business in any law, ever, period. As elected officials you know better than anyone how nonsense language like this can be twisted into a blank check to do whatever an administrator desires.

Some of the questions I heard the bill's sponsors ask last week, "What about a 40% remediation rate?" and "What about job placement?" Frankly, I find these questions disingenuous. This new law does NOTHING to address these very real issues. Issues I see first-hand and issues which desperately need to be addressed. How do we deal with a 40% remediation rate? Perhaps we should stop spending all of our time teaching to the latest test. I spoke with my Rep. Brian Hill last week. He related to me that his daughter graduated 8th in her class at West Muskingum schools last year, my school district. She went to college and was told she needed to take remedial classes. In 2016 West M. students took the "AIR" test, I know because my students went to the school and took that test even though they were home schooling. (You may wonder why we did this - Coming from a family of educators, there is always the Thanksgiving conversation about how the kids are doing – some still wonder if homeschooling is effective – we will come back to that) This Air test was taken in February, during the 2015-2016 school year. By the time June rolled around I was very concerned that I had not yet received those test results, as I had planned to turn them in to the superintendent's office, per the ORC codes for homeschooling, with my annual notification. Imagine my surprise when I was told that the AIR test, just taken by students in February, was no longer a valid test, that no student had received their results, and they agreed to "just skip it" for this year! Just skip turning in the test results that show the progress my students are making! Just skip those pesky test results, the thing the teachers taught to all year, yeah, that test is old news, there is a NEW test for everyone to take, the PARCC test. I relay this story so that you will understand just how ridiculous Race to the top and Common Core (or Ohio Core – or some other program with the same purpose yet known by another misnomer) testing and student tracking has become. My representative's own daughter has become a victim of this system, you owe it to your constituents, and your own children, to do better than a bill that does NOTHING to address the multifaceted problems facing students and educators in Ohio.

One of the sponsors is on record touting the "cradle to career" tracking this bill would allow. To really understand that statement, we need to understand what kinds of tracking are currently

happening in education. K-12 schools already compile massive amounts of information about our students. We expect that the school will keep grade cards and maybe a note about a child with behavior issues, but our schools already keep information on everything from income level (free and reduced lunch programs) to our students behaviors, their grades of course, their family status, race, gender, ethnicity, in some cases their religious beliefs, family medical histories, vaccine compliance, not just academic testing but personality testing, and more. There is so much information gathered by the school that it is protected by a federal law, FERPA (Families Educational Rights and Privacy Act). The creation of an agency that not only compiles student data, but also directs student outcomes from preschool through career – would almost certainly result in what could only be described as career assignment. I believe the word “tracking” is specifically used to confuse to parents, because we are not talking about simply maintaining information about our students, K-12 schools already maintain this information, this “tracking” is actually placing a student on a career path at 11 or 12 years old. This bill opens the door for government sponsored workforce placement and for sensitive student records to be put into the hands of future employers. This would specifically violate FERPA. I’ve only actually touched on K-12 education, not higher Ed. Or Workforce Development, strangely this bill specifically identifies Higher Ed and Workforce Development as needing their own appointees under the new education Czar, a K-12 appointee is never mentioned.

Next we heard about how this bill would streamline the process and finally give the Governor the control he needs to effect good policy changes and make education in Ohio more cohesive. Are you really expecting us to believe that a Governor with 8 political appointees on the school board, and with his party in control of the legislator, can not set educational policy? That one more political appointee is all it would take to turn the tides in our educational system? I think not.

What this bill actually does is limit the seats at the table moving policy discussions inside an unaccountable agency, and excluding stakeholders such as PARENTS, private schools, community schools, home schools, and OS schools. There will be no way for voters to hold these agency employees accountable. Our current state school board, which as you know consists of 11 elected members and 8 appointees, invites all stakeholders to the table and gives ample opportunity for policy discussion and public hearings. The current system encourages collaboration among people from different party affiliations. If the school board opposes the Governor on a policy decision, they are functioning within their duties as given by the Ohio constitution. If the Governor doesn’t get his way, so what? This is what our system of checks and balances is about, we have to work together on policy and see that no one person has too much control. My representative Brian Hill pointed out that he too is elected to represent me, and he is correct in this assertion, however, we expect Rep. Hill to know a little bit about everything, while our school board is expected to know everything about one thing – education. When I pointed this out I was told that school board members are all democrats and elected by big teachers unions and we will never get education reform. Perhaps the person I was speaking with was confused, because this sounds much more like an issue for campaign finance reform, which would logically be heard by this committee and less of an issue about education reform, which would normally be heard by the committee for education.

Committee members, I would encourage you to do some more work on this bill. Creating an agency which encourages collaboration between businesses and schools is a worthy goal, but giving such an agency over reaching power, violating student privacy, placing the priority on testing and race to the top funds, and removing the responsibilities of the State School Board give this bill an almost Orwellian design and I believe that the dangers of such a bill becoming law cannot be overstated.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.