

Dear Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and Honorable Members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee. My name is Laureen Zapf, and I appreciate the opportunity today to offer my written testimony in opposition of House Bill 512, and request that it be entered into official record (as written testimony only).

I have been a stay-at-home mom since my child was born. Prior to that I was employed, and held a job in the pharmaceutical industry. I am thankful to live in a country where I am free to worship and serve The Living God. It is because of those values and beliefs that I chose to be a stay-at-home mom and later to homeschool my child, and we are blessed to have the means to.

I am a member of a group of 8,000 homeschooling parents, which come from all walks of life, different political affiliations, and different belief systems. Yet we encourage and support each other, and we all collectively stand in opposition of proposed House Bill 512.

I oppose the proposed, 2,430 plus page HB 512 because it takes away power, accountability, and a voice at a local level. The proposed Department of Learning and Achievement would be run by a governor appointed director and would subsume most of the current powers of the constitutionally created Board of Education, the Board of Regents, and the Ohio Department of Education. It undermines our basic principle of a representative democratic process as citizens/constituents of Ohio. The proposed DLA would hold all of the power and would only need to be held accountable to the Governor (whomever that may be, as a term is four years and limited to two consecutive terms), and members he/she appoints. History has taught us (then and now) of the painful lessons and reminders of what happens when one or a few have all the power over the people. I am thankful to live here in The United States of America, a democratic republic.

With an elected school board our many communities throughout our state have a way to speak (in each) with elected representatives and to have a voice and an impact on policy that affects us as parents, educators, and as constituents. Proponents of this proposed bill tout that it would "streamline" education, while using tag lines like "crib to career-birth to work." Frankly as a parent, that verbiage is frightening. My child has been entrusted to me by my Creator, to lead, guide, and teach, and I believe it is not the Governor nor the Government's place or right to supersede that. I do not see my child as a number, a statistic, or a test score; especially to help along politically motivated agendas. The very citizens of Ohio, our children, our future, are so much more than that! Such precious lives are not cargo on a conveyor to fulfill a business's ten year plan. They are the very ones that rash policy change would impact and this should be thought out with great consideration, after all they will be the ones here long after we are not.

I could sit here and type a more analytical view, listing concerns many of my fellow opponents have. But I think, and hope by now you have heard and understand at least a baseline of our collective concerns. I was born and raised in the same district my entire life. I absolutely love the small Mayberry feel of my small city, I love our sense of community. And I am now raising my family here. My concern with the proposed bill is that schools in poorer areas of the state could be hugely impacted as new changes mean schools have to adapt and change, which requires money from an already broken school funding system. The children who need to have their schools funded would be at more of a disadvantage because these school resources would have to first go to any changes passed by the DLA. Our school district is small, 410 student in grades 9-12, and 99.3% of students K-12 participate in the National School Lunch Program (NLSLP). Instead of the sponsor and co-sponsor's of this proposed bill placing the burden of a need (want) to improve the workforce on the shoulders of our children, especially small shoulders. Place it on industries and businesses who are struggling to keep employees, because of a lack of a livable wage and employee benefits. These families, these children, these constituents need change now. They desperately need a more livable wage, now. Not a proposed bill with the probability to possibly work to improve that many years to come.

In summary, I as a constituent and parent oppose the proposed bill HB 512 because it robs me of a voice. It takes my fundamental right as a parent away to decide what is best for my child. It leaves an open door for instability in a child's education. Regardless of where a child hangs their book-bag. Because a child's educational years span well over the course of one governor's term, and that flux leaves open a possibility for pendulum policy change. What assurances can you offer to me as a homeschooling parent? Any corporeal assurance for that cannot be found anywhere in the 2,400+ pages. A new governor will be elected this year, in our swing state. Giving sole power to whomever he or she may be to appoint an unelected official to make crucial educational decisions and policy that would affect thousands of Ohio families, is perilous. That is why "fast tracking" our very future, our precious children, should not be rushed. It should be carefully thought through, keeping lines of communication open at a local level, and remaining respectful to the voice of the parents who know them best. And I feel this proposed bill is not about enhancing, improving, or streamlining the educational system. But rather that you view our children as pawns. And my child is not a pawn for a mega-bureaucracy, social engineering, or political agendas. Children are not a one-size-fits-all, they are not cookie-cutter. But rather they are individual and unique in their likes and dislikes, and in their learning abilities, and they all learn in uniquely different ways. Those are the very uniquenesses that should be honed and protected. My prayer and hope is that you as members of committee are also parents and grandparents, and would want your children and grandchildren to feel they live in a world where they can still be whatever they dream to be.

