



EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Witness Form

Today's Date November 7, 2017

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Organization Representing: Superintendent - Fairfield Union Local School District

Testifying on Bill Number: Senate Bill 216

Testimony: Verbal Written Both

Testifying As: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Are you a Registered Lobbyist? Yes No

Special Requests: None



Fairfield Union Local School District

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Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 216

Chairman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Chad Belville, Superintendent of the Fairfield Union Local School District in Fairfield County, and I testify today as a proponent of Senate Bill 216.

The Fairfield Union Local School District is a rural school district comprised of approximately 2,000 students located just East of Lancaster. My school district is nestled in a farm community with deep rooted pride and tradition. Like many other districts our size, Fairfield Union is the centerpiece of the community, and my students are multi-generational Fairfield Union students.

My testimony today will focus on two aspects of Senate Bill 216 as I want to respect the time of this committee and others who will be providing testimony today. However, I do want to stress my belief in the overwhelming benefits this entire bill would have for districts like mine. Like each person here today, I love the kids in my district, and I want nothing but the very best for them. While we may differ on the road to our goals, it is reassuring to know that we do have the same goals in mind.

The first piece of Senate Bill 216 I would like to discuss would be the impact on licensure and permits. Fairfield Union is within a 25 minute drive of Pickerington, Canal Winchester, Lancaster, and Logan-Hocking school districts. Due to the opportunities and financial capabilities offered by these school districts, Fairfield Union struggles to attract and retain high quality teachers and aides. However, substantially larger pay and more classroom materials are not the most difficult hurdle I face when filling openings in my school district.

This past summer, Fairfield Union had to replace 14 teachers and aides. We were not able to fill the final couple of positions until the first week of school, and this created an extremely challenging environment for my staff. In education, we are facing a crisis with the pending teacher shortage in our state, especially in the fields of science and math. The salaries offered by larger districts around me create a challenge, but the greatest impact on hiring is quite frankly a lack of applicants. By allowing school districts the flexibility of grade band certifications, smaller schools could identify good, young teachers coming out of college to fill our most difficult openings.

In my district, many life-long residents who become educators, have skills that could translate to the classroom in a way that is not measurable by current licensure standards. For example, a teacher who has been a farmer their entire life could theoretically help teach biology or an agriculture science class at the high school level even though right now they have a K-8 certification. Senate Bill 216 would give Superintendents the authority to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of their staff, and then determine how to best utilize the resources available.



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Please know this is not a referendum on the work being performed by the Licensure Office at the Ohio Department of Education. Administrative teams in school districts evaluate and assess teaching ability on a daily basis. I believe school administrators are more qualified to determine the proper placement of a teacher than someone at ODE with zero classroom experience.

I would also like to applaud Senate Bill 216 addressing various pieces of student management and safety. I assure this committee educators are committed to creating a safe environment for students, and we more than welcome the increase in accountability in our state. However, by creating an overabundance of "red tape" requirements, schools are spending more time on procedures instead of spending more time with kids.

A prime example of this are the requirements associated with ORC 3321.191 and truancy. Under the new requirements for truancy, school districts are required to send truancy letters to students who miss 38 hours in a month or 65 hours in a year regardless of the excuse for the absence. Requiring districts to take the time to send attendance letters to students who are absent with doctor's excuses makes absolutely no sense. It is a waste of the school's time, and for families dealing with a severe health crisis, the attendance letter is a stressor the family does not need.

In many ways, Senate Bill 216 would provide freedom and flexibility for schools like Fairfield Union to operate more efficiently and effectively. Senate Bill 216 is a measure that restores some control to local districts without absolving districts of the accountability we all welcome.

Mrs. Chairman, thank you again for this opportunity to express my views on Senate Bill 216, and I will be happy to address the committee's questions at the pleasure of the Chair.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chad Belville, Superintendent
Fairfield Union Local School District