

Senate Finance Committee
Re: Repeal of Ohio Revised Code Section 3319.223, the Resident Educator Program
June 14, 2017

Good morning, Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 49.

My name is Carol Theis, and I live in Aurora, Ohio. Since the Resident Educator Program began, I have been the Resident Educator Program Coordinator for the Solon City Schools. I have been involved with teacher mentoring for over 20 years, and I have always been an advocate for teachers.

During my 30-plus years in the educational field, I have watched how Ohio has made many shifts in how new teachers are supported from utilizing the Praxis III program, local mentoring efforts, and now the Resident Educator Program. I must express my strong opposition to the proposed elimination of the Resident Educator Program and the Resident Educator Summative Assessment (RESA). My work with this program has solidified my belief that Ohio needs the Resident Educator Program and the RESA to provide new teachers with the skills needed to become highly-effective educators.

In Solon we are dedicated to excellence in education. Our Resident Educator Mentors are committed to helping our new teachers to develop skills that incorporate best practices and are aligned with the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession. Occasionally, Solon will hire a teacher who completed Year 1 or Year 2 of the Resident Educator Program in another Ohio school district. Unfortunately, there can be a great discrepancy in the level of mentoring provided in different districts. Teachers who previously taught at other districts have reported everything from extensive mentoring to no mentoring at all. Some districts seem to have mentoring programs in name only. It is obvious that a local mentoring program cannot be used as a guarantee for quality instruction in Ohio.

Mentoring must be combined with some additional method of accountability for teacher effectiveness throughout the entire state of Ohio. The RESA provides just that. It is the backbone of the entire Resident Educator Program and ensures all students will have a competent teacher who has demonstrated the minimum skills to be an effective educator. Districts hiring a teacher who has successfully completed the RESA can be confident that a basic skill base has been achieved.

Pre-service teachers must demonstrate certain minimum skills to be able to enter the classroom. The Resident Educator Program provides them with the support they need while gathering evidence of actual teaching in their own classrooms. The RESA then provides the framework for them to demonstrate these skill sets. A strong positive of the RESA is that the teachers are assessed by a highly-trained, unbiased, and anonymous assessor who also works in the same field. The assessment is only based on the evidence that the teacher candidate provides, so the teachers have complete control over what the assessor evaluates.

The feedback provided on the RESA is an incredible growth opportunity for teachers, and our teachers appreciate the value of this. After three attempts, the cumulative pass rate on the RESA is over 98%. Logically, the less than two percent of teachers who are not successful are the most vocal critics of the assessment. However, it is important to consider why these teachers have not been able to pass the RESA after three attempts where at least six different unbiased assessors have viewed the teacher's submissions.

Do we want a guaranteed level of competency for all teachers in Ohio? Are students entitled to a minimum level of teacher quality, regardless of where they live in the state? Ohio cannot afford to take a step backward and eliminate the Resident Educator Program and the RESA. If that happens, do you have a plan for how we will support beginning teachers and ensure they have the minimum skills necessary to effectively lead a classroom? On behalf of mentor teachers across the state, I urge you not to throw the baby out with the bath water. Please maintain the Resident Educator Program and the RESA and allow for the implementation of the planned improvements to next year's RESA. The Resident Educator Program and the RESA are truly an investment in our teachers and all the students of Ohio.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.