



**State Representative Joe Miller
House District 56**

**House Primary and Secondary Education Committee - HB 154 Testimony
April 2, 2019**

Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 154. HB 154 ends state takeovers of public schools, restores local control over the school turnaround process, and provides a framework for struggling buildings to utilize state expertise and forge their own path to success.

Our discussion of HB 154 has to start with the story of HB 70, which devised the top-down, state-controlled model we have today. In 2015, HB 70 started out as a bipartisan bill that built on the success of Community Learning Centers, or CLCs. In places like Cincinnati, CLCs had demonstrated value in helping buildings and districts address their unique challenges by embedding badly-needed health and social services directly in school buildings.

HB 70 went from a bill with widespread support to an extremely divisive piece of legislation that would have far-reaching implications for children, teachers, parents and school districts across the state. The 'new' HB 70, which ballooned from 10 pages to 77, shifted the focus well beyond wraparound services to a complete reimagining of the state's model for turning around districts that had fallen under 'Academic Distress' based on their district report card.

Previously in an advisory role, these State-controlled Academic Distress Commissions or ADC's, which already existed in places like Lorain and Youngstown, were given new authority to appoint a district CEO. In HB 70's own words, the CEO was given "complete operational, managerial, and instructional control" of the district. And if you can believe it, the powers of the ADCs and CEO actually expanded over time. Local stakeholders were stripped of any meaningful input, oversight, or power, outside of school boards approving levies to be put on the ballot.

On June 24th 2015, in one single day, these radical new elements were amended into HB 70, it was reported out of the Senate education committee, passed by the Senate, and then passed by the House. Reasonable people can disagree over the merits of the bill; but I think we can all agree that the process it underwent is not what we think of when we imagine how good public policy is created.

You have to wonder if it's any surprise, then, that we've ended up where we are. An undemocratic process, empowered unaccountable district CEOs leading to unacceptable outcomes for our communities. In Lorain, I have heard from every level-- parents, teachers, administrators, and even students-- about this issue. Underpinning all their stories is a fundamental disconnect between the state-imposed administration and everyone else who makes up the community they're ostensibly trying to serve.

This feedback informs the central tenet of our bill, HB 154. Simply stated, HB 154 restores community ownership over the quality of schools in their neighborhood. Local buy-in is an essential component of school improvement. What we've seen in Lorain and Youngstown is that when you don't provide a meaningful way for residents and stakeholders to have their voice heard, be part of the turnaround process, and have skin in the game - the likelihood for success is slim to none.

HB 154 has two major components. The first piece is moving our state beyond the ADC/CEO model that simply hasn't worked. Places like Lorain and Youngstown need a fresh start. I can tell you in Lorain, the constant barrage of dysfunction, last-minute changes and infighting have worn people down. They need a moment to regroup, turn the page and shift the conversation to what will work, so we can come together and provide our children with the quality education they deserve.

HB 154 lays out a framework for communities to have that very discussion. Our intent was to recognize that everyone has had a different path up to this point, and moving forward will have a different path to success. We also recognize that school districts are not homogenous entities. Needed services in a rural district may not be what is needed in an urban district, and what works in a district's middle school might not make sense for its high school. That's why HB 154 moves away from triggers based on district report cards towards building-based assessment and reform. This change also removes the ability for districts to hide behind a solid overall grade and avoid addressing their low-performing buildings.

Based on feedback and ongoing discussions with stakeholders, we're expecting some changes to HB 154. And we're open to discussing further changes as the process moves along. But the underlying vision of HB 154 is clear. Restore local control, provide state support, and give communities the tools they need by leveraging proven improvement strategies.

I want to wrap up by briefly discussing a recent report from the Ohio Department of Education that members of this committee may have seen regarding Academic Distress Commissions. The last GA required the ODE to report on ways to improve the existing ADC model. While we don't agree on everything, I was heartened to read that ODE recognizes a number of the same issues with HB 70 that those of us in Lorain and Youngstown have witnessed firsthand. The report acknowledges that changes are needed, and offers up some potential solutions that track closely with our bill. Based on the report and my discussions with the State Superintendent

DeMaria, I am hopeful that ODE will be a strong partner in our effort to improve the state's school turnaround model.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB 154. I will be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.