

**Testimony on House Bill 127**  
***DISTRESS COMMISSION MORATORIUM***  
**Before the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**The Honorable Louis Blessing III, Chair**  
**By Susan Kaeser, LWV Ohio Specialist**  
**April 8, 2019**

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee: I am Susan Kaeser, LWV Ohio Specialist on Education Policy. I have been a tutor and volunteer at Boulevard Elementary school in Cleveland Heights since 1988, and have served as the Executive Director of Teaching Heights, an organization that mobilizes community to support schools. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you the concerns of the League of Women Voters Ohio about Academic Distress Commissions, and why no new commissions should be created.

This testimony is offered in support of HB 127, which would prevent the formation of any additional Academic Distress Commissions. It is also relevant to and supports HB 154, which would dissolve existing commissions and takes a school-based approach to trying to improve student educational outcomes.

The League of Women Voters Ohio is a strong supporter of public education. Our advocacy for public education began in the 1930s. Good governance is core issue for the League, and this includes governance of our public schools. The League supports Ohio's approach to governing our system of common schools: the locally elected school board is constitutionally established to provide oversight and direction to the education system in each district. While we support the role of the state in public education, Academic Distress Commissions are not an effective model for shared responsibility because:

State control of local districts is inefficient. Thus far, evidence shows that state takeovers of local school districts in Ohio and around the country have meant an increase in administrative pay and a decrease in resources for students that need the most help.

Academic Distress Commissions are undemocratic. The governance of Ohio's public schools is the responsibility of the democratically elected board of education. Takeover by the State Department of Education is outside the purview of the administrative branch of our state government.

Appointed district administrators are unaccountable. The creation of academic distress commissions decreases the system of checks and balances that exists between local and state governance.

Using the report card to identify failed systems discriminates against high-poverty school districts and unfairly burdens those communities with a loss of local control. Student test scores are highly correlated to socioeconomic factors like wealth and education level of parents. Distress commissions increase differential treatment between poor and wealthy districts.

Finally, this is the wrong remedy. The needs of high-poverty school districts are not a function of governance. We need a much more robust approach to supporting children. Labeling districts failures and then seizing control of them does not make sense if our state wants all children to be competent citizens who have a fair shake at life, lifted first by their experience in school.

Thank you for considering these ideas as you make important decisions that will affect education opportunity in our state.

Respectfully,

Susie Kaeser, Lobby Corps Member, LWVO