

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 154. I am especially grateful to Representatives Don Jones and Joe Miller for introducing this important legislation and to Representatives Ingram, Sobecki, and Strahorn for joining as co-sponsors. My name is Brittany Alexander. I am an educator and an advocate for our children.

Last week, we heard a brief history of HB 70 from the 131st General Assembly during sponsor testimony. To my knowledge, state takeovers have not successfully improved student learning anywhere they have been implemented. After nearly four years, and with two of the three districts currently under receivership in utter chaos, it is time to recognize that this approach is not working for Ohio either.

In an attempt to restore local control, HB 154 would dissolve current academic distress commissions, and instead require schools deemed “low-performing” to adopt a community learning center model. This was the intent of the original, unamended HB 70 that received wide bipartisan support. The involvement of community stakeholders regarding performance and improvement plans for **their** children and **their** schools is precisely what HB 70 lacks.

I teach in a suburb of Columbus, and so my professional world is a far cry from that of my colleagues in Youngstown, Lorain, and many other places across Ohio. I cannot help but to wonder how different things might look for Youngstown and Lorain had we addressed equity and adequacy of school funding as aggressively as we pursued accountability measures over the past two decades. I submit to you that these districts are not failing. They have been and are continuing to be failed by the state. Right now, we have an opportunity to begin to repair what has been broken both by underfunding and by state takeovers. Right now, this committee can make a difference for not just our kids, but for whole communities.

We may never know the undemocratic sting of having the state usurp the power of our elected school board in my district, but that is not a certainty. And even if it were, it would do nothing to calm my troubled thoughts. I cannot stop thinking of the pleas from so many educators, parents, students, and community members over the past few years. They want to be involved in establishing a path forward. They want to be heard. HB 154 will give them an opportunity to be part of the solution for their communities. It is the least we can do after wreaking such havoc on already underserved schools.

I urge your support of HB 154, and respectfully request your consideration for an emergency clause that would allow the bill to take effect prior to the 2019 - 2020 school year. I thank you for your time and your consideration.