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Senate Bill 110
Sponsor Testimony
March 25th, 2019

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 110. If passed, SB 110 will fix many of the flaws of House Bill 70 by restructuring how the Academic Distress Commission (ADC) oversees Lorain City Schools.

Passed in the 131st General Assembly, House Bill 70 is the law responsible for governing school districts in academic distress by appointing a CEO to take over sole responsibility of a school district, as well as establishing an academic distress commission to support school district improvement. In July of 2017, Lorain City Schools Academic Distress Commission was created, and since then, has struggled to improve.

Recently, Forbes.com released an article titled "*Lorain, Ohio, and The Failure of School Takeover Policy.*" This article details how badly Lorain's school takeover has gone over the last year and a half. I encourage all of you to read the entire article, but the second to last paragraph summarizes why HB 70 is failing, as it sets up any CEO for failure. "But plenty of blame belongs to HB 70 itself. The legislature proposed it as an amendment, held hearings, and **passed it into law in a single day**, allowing for no discussion of the bill's implications. It requires superhuman abilities for its CEO, who must be a master of every single aspect of running a school district, apply those skills to a district that is already struggling, develop a speedy understanding of the local dynamics of the community, and do it all while working and building relationships with people who are unlikely to be happy that the state has just stripped them of all local power. It is difficult to imagine a human being who could do the job well or to envision a circumstance under which HB 70 could actually work. The only likely outcome is that the local district would ultimately be dismantled and replaced with privately operated charter schools."

While the Forbes article clearly summarizes the flaws in HB 70, it does not begin to scratch the surface of the community outrage in Lorain. The failure of HB 70 has frequently been brought to my attention by the Mayor, School Board members, teachers, students, and local parents. While the communities overarching concern is regarding students' education being negatively affected, many of their specific concerns are addressed in SB 110.

Senate Bill 110 only applies to Lorain City Schools, as these are the complaints I heard specifically from the Lorain community. It will change how one member of the ADC board is appointed. Currently the State Superintendent has three appointments, the Mayor has one, and the School Board had one and this legislation simply takes one appointment from the State Superintendent and gives it to the Mayor. This change effectively brings more local control and community input on who is appointed to the ADC. Additionally, SB 110 creates a financial and performance audit for the school district to be conducted annually by the Auditor of the State. Performance audits typically identify and help correct inefficient processes to ensure efficient operation of public offices and schools.

Senate Bill 110 requires that the ADC conduct an annual performance evaluation of the CEO and submit it to the Board of Education for review. It also requires the CEO to appear before the School Board to answer any questions and present an update on what is happening in the school district at least quarterly, or the School Board may request the CEO to address them at a regularly scheduled meeting. These provisions will ensure accountability, improve transparency, and help the CEO and school district improve.

This bill also separates the power between the CEO and the Treasurer. Currently, the CEO of the school district has the power to appoint the Treasurer, but SB 110 gives the power back to the School Board. The School Board is in control of putting a school levy on the ballot and therefore it would be logical that they have the appointing authority for the treasurer position.

While there is still additional work to be done, Senate Bill 110 goes a long way to improving the situation in Lorain City Schools by bringing back some local control and creating some much needed accountability. While House Bill 70 was created with good intentions, it has created many more problems than it has solved. It is clear that local leaders and residents do not want a one size fits all policy forced on them by the State of Ohio with zero input from the community. I want to thank Chairwoman Lehner for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony and also for all of her help and guidance on this issue. I also want to thank the Mayor of Lorain, Chase Ritenauer, School Board President Mark Ballard, and a multitude of other community members that helped identify the needs that are addressed in this legislation. If there are any questions from the Committee, I am happy to answer them at this time.

Respectfully,



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