

Proponent Testimony
Senate Bill No. 253

Senator Kunze, Sponsor

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Minority Member Maharath, and distinguished members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for S.B. 253 sponsored by Senator Kunze.

Senator Kunze and I have been actively working for several years to provide public school districts with legislative options to keep our young people safe in rapidly changing educational times. S.B. 253 adds several tools to the toolbox for district administrators while also providing support for students with mental health issues.

In today's social media culture, threats are a substantial disruption to the educational process. Furthermore, the proliferation of threats in schools is indicative of growing mental health and wellness issues among youth today. The Hilliard City School District has taken significant steps to provide support for students. From additional counselors to the formation of Hope Squads, from measuring Social Emotional Learning (SEL) attributes to hiring a Director of Student Well Being, the district is committed to serving every student. We are making progress, but there is still much work to be done.

This legislation gives the district the option of requiring a mental health assessment to determine if the student is a risk to him/herself or others. Hilliard employs licensed professionals to conduct such evaluation or offers parents the option of using an external mental health professional with the release of the report to the district.

S.B. 253 also requires reporting these threats and actions to the Ohio School Safety Center. This information, gathered at a state-level, will assist all of us to better ascertain specific issues, create better support systems, and potentially begin to use analytics to identify conditions where threats are more likely.

In Hilliard, our district's Joint-Safety Task Force, a partnership with the school district, Hilliard Police, Norwich Township Fire & Rescue, and other regional law enforcement partners, has proven vital in developing best practices to respond to threats. Our district has worked with the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Ohio Attorney General's Office, Department of Homeland Security, Columbus Police Department, and Ohio State Highway Patrol on cases this year and over the past several years. We have a model program, but additional support is required to keep our students safe.

We have held dozens of expulsion hearings to date this year. Not one single case has resulted in a student being denied educational opportunities. There are many cases where students have been removed from the traditional school setting. There are several cases where we have required further evaluations or counseling. We have placed students in our "Personal Success Network" for mental health support and put a handful of students in our digital courses to work from home. We keep students out of the traditional school setting until we have reasonable assurances that they are not a threat to others. This legislation will provide specific direction not only for Hilliard but for all districts across Ohio.

S.B. 253 specifically enumerates that actions Hilliard has been implementing at the local level, and take it to the next level. The state-wide reporting and specific options S.B. 253 provides to all school districts will keep Ohio's student safer without creating any unreasonable requirements or work for school officials.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. John C. Marschhausen
Superintendent/CEO
Hilliard City School District