Good afternoon, Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Hayes, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Angela Lee, Director of Public Affairs for Easter Seals Ohio. Thank for allowing me to submit my written testimony on behalf of Easter Seals Ohio in support of House Bill 410-which looks to establish a process to reform Ohio's truancy laws. Easter Seals of Ohio, founded in Ohio almost 100 years ago, operates programs throughout Ohio for at-risk youth, court involved youth, youth with disabilities through mentoring programs, early intervention programs, Head Start Programs, after school programs, and summer camps.

As we look at the importance of this reform within HB 410, we need to ask ourselves two questions: *What is the problem we are trying to solve and how is this good for Ohio?* To appropriately address these questions we must first look at Ohio's landscape, understanding the changes that lurk over the horizon. In 2020, Ohio's baby boomers will begin leaving the workforce and Ohio will see its labor force begin to experience a downturn in numbers.[1] By 2035, Ohio may be facing a possible crisis as her workforce continues to age, as more baby boomers enter retirement and the number of persons in the workforce declines. According to AARP-Ohio, it is estimated that by 2035 Ohio's older population will exceed 24%, with only 50% of the population sustaining Ohio's workforce. We need to begin to set goals in order to be prepared for 21st Century careers. One way to do that is by revising or reforming in a very common sense approach the archaic rules affecting Ohio's youth, such as Ohio's truancy and school discipline statutes. Representatives of the House Education Committee, **now** is the time to make these changes instead of making them during a time of crisis or "last" minute thinking.

The children currently in grade school are known as Generation Z (GenZ), they are our next workforce generation and so investing in them now will reap the dividends necessary to sustain and secure Ohio's economic future and well-being. The GenZ generation is the smallest of all generations, as population growth plunged in the United States during the mid-point in GenZ birth years[2], making it even more imperative we cultivate their relationships with positive role models when necessary to ensure their success in education and employment. They are unique in how they learn how they interact with people and are hyper-connected to the world. GenZer's want to engage in the co-construction of knowledge; they want to be a part of the solution not just the recipient of it. Like their predecessors, this generation will expect the formation of relationships to happen in "an on demand" platform. Additionally They will be needed in the job market-65% of them will work in jobs that don't exist today; Racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries will be invisible to them; They will be less youth-oriented and more adult-focused; and They will be saddled with economic responsibility for a huge aging population.[3] HB410 is one tool we can provide educators, providers, families and most of all, Ohio's youth with to increase their likelihood to succeed in their education, their careers, and within their communities.

Ohio's overall economy continues to grow with a reported December 2015 unemployment rate of 4.7%. However, research has clearly demonstrated those students failing to acquire even a high school diploma, usually as result of truant behavior, have a bleak outlook including low income earning potential and a higher rate of unemployment. The US Census

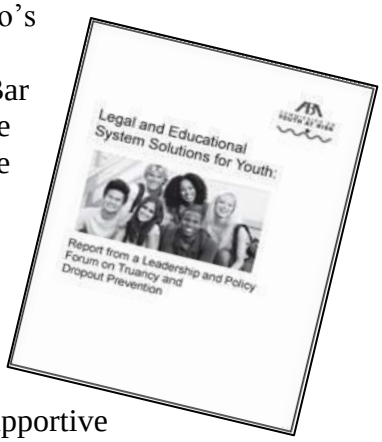
[1] AARP Workforce Profiles-Selected Characteristics of US Workers and Non-Workers Age 40+-Ohio

[2] Raines, Claire. "10 Predictions for Generation Z." AMACOM Books. March 14th, 2013.

[3] Raines, Claire. "10 Predictions for Generation Z." AMACOM Books. March 14th, 2013

Bureau states the average income a school dropout can expect to earn is $20,241 which is $10,386 less than someone who completed high school.[4] According to the Department of Education, persons ages 18-24 without a high school diploma experience a poverty rate of 30.8% compared to their peers with a diploma with a much lower poverty rate of 13.5%.[5] Northeastern University conducted a study, stating individuals without a diploma are 63 times more likely to become incarcerated.[6] Taking into account the aforementioned dismal statistics, this reform has the potential to develop the foundation for students to develop the resiliency needed to remain interested in school during their pivotal years.

HB410 opens the truancy discussion by putting common sense solutions on the table. When a student undergoes trauma at home (abuse, family illness, death, and homelessness), at school (bullying) or in the community, learning and school readiness take a back seat to self-preservation. This bill will allow persons involved in a child's education to identify factors causing the child's absence at the early onset instead of waiting until the child and/or family are in crisis. Youth disconnected from societal anchors lack the ability to set formidable and achievable goals and will face a myriad of obstacles over their lifespan. HB 410 is one bill that understands and is recognizing the importance of restructuring Ohio's current truancy statutes.



A host of reputable associations including The American Bar Association (ABA) understand the importance of truancy reform. The ABA passed a resolution in 2009, which included strategies to encourage states to pass legislation and implement policies that do the following[7]:

1. Seek improvements in state and federal law to protect and advance the right to high quality education, including the enactment of remedies to secure that right administratively and judicially;
2. Help advance the right to remain in school, promote a safer and supportive school environment for all children, and enable them to complete school;
3. Reduce criminalization of truancy, disability-related behavior, and other school related conduct; and
4. Establish programs and procedures to assist parents, caregivers, guardians, students, and their legal representatives in understanding and exercising students' rights to remain in school.

Failing to address truancy and school disciplines issues can have a profound impact on societal and economic factors in the community. For example:

1. Truancy is associated with increased odds of first time substance abuse, and if an adolescent has already begun using, truancy is related to a substantial escalation of use.[8] Given the current heroin epidemic facing our state, any tool we can provide to our

[4] United States Census Bureau

[5] "By the Numbers: Dropping Out of High School." Frontline. 2012.

[6] "By the Numbers: Dropping Out of High School." Frontline. 2012.

[7] American Bar Association, "Report from a Leadership and Policy Forum on Truancy and Dropout Prevention." *Legal and Educational Solutions for Youth.* Report Issued August 2012.

[8] Kimberly Henry & Terrence Thornberry. "Truancy and Escalation of Substance Use During Adolescence," 71 J. on the Study of Alcohol and Drugs 115 (2000).

communities to combat this scourge destroying our families should be considered. Just as alarming, truant youth with disabilities (many are bullied, suffer from low self-esteem and are fearful which can lead to increase absenteeism) are two times more likely to abuse prescription pain medications according to a 2013 report issued by the Ohio Disability Health Program.

2. Truancy has been identified as a likely precursor to serious nonviolent/violent offenses amongst youth.[9] Even more alarming, The National Center for Juvenile Justice highlights when you're talking about juveniles getting in trouble, you think about boys more than girls. Boys are overrepresented in [almost] every category – but not truancy. Boys (54%) and girls (46%) are equally likely to be truant. Investing in the solution presented by HB410, allows us to create an infrastructure of opportunity that will seek to break the cycle of generational and educational immobility. It has the potential to create new pathways for civic engagement and future employment/educational endeavors. Without this investment in the social capital of these youth, or "their lack of access to social structures in order to achieve a certain end will significantly impact their future."[10]

3. Truancy causes a cyclical drain on our economy. Truant youth are more likely to have higher levels of early pregnancy and infant mortality, while requiring more social services that does not end when they turn 18[11]; in fact the problems are exacerbated into adulthood as they tend to work in low-paying jobs, live in poverty and utilize entitlement programs extensively. It is the taxpayer that foots this bill. HB410 presents us with the opportunity to intervene early; preventing costly consequences for our failure to act.

4. Students with disability are more likely than students without one to have missed three or more school days in a month. In 2015, 26% of fourth-eighth graders with a disability reportedly missed more school days compared to 18% of students without a disability.[12]

5. According to the highlighted chart below, data (retrieved on January 28th, 2016) from the Ohio Department of Education's website http://bireports.education.ohio.gov, 2013-2014 School Year-*Disciplinary Actions per 100 Students (State)-Economic Disadvantaged/All Discipline Types/Disability vs No Disability*, illustrates devastating statistics that show children who face economic barriers, such as food and housing, represent a disproportionate number of vulnerable children in the school disciplinary process.

Disability	Grade Level	Economic Disadvantage**	All Discipline Types Disciplinary Actions Per 100 Students
No Disability	5th Grade	N	3.1
		Y	22.7
	6th Grade	N	6.0

[9] Myrian Baker, Nady Sigmon, & Elaine Nugent. US Dept. of Justice, "Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School" Sept. 2001.

[10] Marin, LM & Halpern DF. (2011) Pedagogy for Developing Critical Thinking In Adolescents: Explicit Instruction Produces Greatest Gains. *Thinking Skills and Creativity.*

[11] American Bar Association, "Report from a Leadership and Policy Forum on Truancy and Dropout Prevention." *Legal and Educational Solutions for Youth.* Report Issued August 2012.

[12] Child Trends, Data Bank. "Student Absenteeism" http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=student-absenteeism. 2015.

		Y	41.6
	7th Grade	N	8.7
		Y	58.9
	8th Grade	N	9.0
		Y	57.7
	9th Grade	N	13.2
		Y	72.8
	10th Grade	N	11.9
		Y	51.1
	11th Grade	N	10.6
		Y	34.9
	12th Grade	N	10.6
		Y	26.5
Multiple Disabilities (other than Deaf-Blind)	5th Grade	N	4.7
		Y	9.7
	6th Grade	N	3.4
		Y	14.6
	7th Grade	N	1.6
		Y	22.1
	8th Grade	N	4.3
		Y	20.8
	9th Grade	N	1.6
		Y	19.2
	10th Grade	N	3.7
		Y	23.2
	11th Grade	N	4.3
		Y	16.9
	12th Grade	N	1.5
		Y	7.7

** *Economic Disadvantage consists of: Students who are known to be eligible to receive free/reduced-price lunches; Students who have not submitted an application for free/reduced-price lunch or who have not been directly certified as eligible but reside in a household in which a member (e.g., sibling) is known to be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; Students who are known to be recipients of or whose guardians are known to be recipients of public assistance; and Students whose parents or guardians have completed a Title I student income form and meet the income guidelines specified.*

There are funding outlets that could be utilized to help support the implementation items described in HB410. A recent study by University of Chicago Nobel economist James Heckman emphasized the need to sustain early investment in at-rick children. He reported that with "skill building" strategies such as meaningful sustainable relationships, youth were much less likely to become delinquent. Heckman found that when the investments "were sustained into the teenage years," 90% of youth finished high school and 40% went on to attend college.[13] Heckman went on to say, "to put these numbers in perspective, sustained investments go a long way toward shrinking and in some cases eliminating the nation's worrisome racial disparities in academic achievement, drug use, and college attendance."[14] So what are some possible funding avenues for this investment? Here are a few suggestions to be considered:

[13] James Heckman & Flavio Cunha. "Investing in Our Young People." 2007.
[14] Id.

1. Using Title I Grants for Low-Income Students who exhibit poor attendance and truancy at all levels. Title I funds are to be used for strengthening the core academic program, increase the amount of quality learning time, and can be used to include interventions to meet educational needs of underserved populations. Funds can be used for before/after school programs, counseling, pupil services, and mentoring services.

2. On December 10th, 2015 the President of the United States signed the bi-partisan *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* that governs the country's K-12 public education policy replacing the *No Child Left Behind Act*. It passed the House with a vote of 359/64 and the Senate with a vote of 85/12. The Act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The bill has a number of opportunities to manage funding to address the monetary concerns possibly associated with the passage of HB410. The Act has several key components[15]:

    a. States must reserve 7% of its Title I-A allocation for school improvement to serve schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement or targeted support and improvement activities;
    b. States may reserve up to 3% of their Title I allocation to provide grants to districts for "direct student services" including academic tutoring;
    c. Eliminates 50 individual programs and creates a new block grant, "Student Support and Academic Enrichment" for counseling and safe and healthy students;
    d. Authorizes Family Engagement Centers including a replacement of the "Parental Involvement Policy" to the "Parent and Family Engagement Policy" ensuring regular two-way, meaningful communication between family members and school staff. Further, in carrying this out local educational agencies and schools, to the extent practicable, shall provide opportunities for the informed participation of parents and family members;
    e. State must report on the reduction of the number and percentage of students who drop out of school;
    f. Allows states to use a single annual summative assessment;
    g. Maintains 95% participation requirement but states can create its own "opt out" policy and decide how to include it in the accountability system; and
    h. Add additional sub-groups for data collection to include: homeless status, students with parents in the military, and students in foster care.

3. There is a tendency to become "siloed" when looking for funding by limiting ourselves to the subject matter. The key to funding and sustainability is to link the problems to more funding streams. Attendance, truancy, school discipline, and dropping out are problems that affect a broad range of bad outcomes, it should be considered as a part of a comprehensive approach to poverty, drug abuse, delinquency, mobility, school failure, job skills, and high school graduation.[16] As a state, we need to be more creative in our

[15] Every Student Succeeds Act enacted by the 114th United Sates Congress. 2015.

[16] American Bar Association, "Report from a Leadership and Policy Forum on Truancy and Dropout Prevention." *Legal and Educational Solutions for Youth.* Report Issued August 2012.

approach to federal funding. Other federal funding opportunities that target as-risk youth, school intervention programs, and criminal justice related topics can be found at a myriad of other agencies, such as but not limited to:

a. Department of Justice Grants including Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Grants;
b. Department of Labor's Workforce Investment Opportunity Act;
c. Department of Health and Human Services;
d. McKinney-Vento Homeless Grants; and
e. Second Chance Act Grants (varying federal agencies/blended funding).

4. Explore the possibility of working with local business and private organizations to sponsor a program that supports the goals of reducing truant behavior, increasing academic performance, building a sustainable workforce and enhancing community safety. We all have a vested interest ensuring children grow up to become successful contributing adults.

As with any program involving youth, parental involvement is a key component. We need to be realistic and recognize that not every parent engages in their child's educational success. But that does not mean we give up altogether. The ABA believes there are four key elements in addressing a holistic approach: evaluation, communication/public education, intervention/prevention, and individualized assessments. The idea within HB410 that directs the Department of Education to create a pilot program for multidisciplinary truancy teams is a step in the right direction.

Building successful and resilient children is not only important to their futures and their families but also to the well-being and quality of life in neighborhoods throughout Ohio and to its economic growth. The development of career pathways is now being addressed from within a fundamentally different framework or paradigm; one that recognizes educational systems alone are not sufficient to guide behavior and build resiliency in students and that continuing to rely on this system to do so promises to repeat the failures of the past. WE need to work together to address the issues plaguing our state's children. One of the most important findings of education psychology of the past 30 years is "the positive relationship between the amount and quality of the time engaged in academic learning and student achievement."[17] Addressing the issues of truancy and school discipline not only opens the doors to potential lifelong employment prospects but "bolsters the outlook for youth to achieve economic resilience as adults and a fulfilling social and civic life"[18] while potentially increasing savings to school districts, court systems, and local communities. On behalf of Easter Seals Ohio, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 410.

Angela Lee
Director of Public Affairs
Easter Seals Ohio

[17] Skiba, R.J. & Rausch, M.K. 2006
[18] Covey, Stephen. Building a Culture of Leadership. The Leader in Me Vision Training Participant Guide