



**State Representative John Patterson
99th District**

House Bill 438
Sponsor Testimony
House Education Committee
April 13, 2016

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Hayes, Ranking Member Fedor, and distinguished members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 438.

On its surface, HB 438 is a simplistic and straight forward bill—it is designated to set aside the week prior to Thanksgiving Week as “Ohio Public Education Appreciation Week.”

First, to clear any confusion, this particular time period in November, as specified in the bill, marks the last full week prior to the shortened one which includes the Thanksgiving holiday. Though Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday, the week itself could be the third, or occasionally, the second full week of the month—hence the unique phrasing of HB 438.

Second, the proposed time period aligns with American Education Week (which will be celebrated November 14-18 this year). The National Education Association notes that American Education Week “...present(s) all Americans with a wonderful opportunity to celebrate public education and honor individuals who are making a difference in ensuring that every child receives a quality education.”

Make no mistake—our public schools are under stress, under scrutiny, and under-appreciated. Our students today do not necessarily receive the support at home they once did—support that augmented that which was learned at school. Indeed, some students rely on our public schools for their own primary sustenance through our breakfast, lunch, and weekend backpack programs. To be sure, public schools are asked to do far more today than what was once their mission years ago in terms of student support.

Our public school teachers are under scrutiny to perform and excel in this new reality. They have become our public psychologists, health experts, counselors, and, of course, educators (when they can). Our teachers must offer inspiring lessons that are creative and engaging, yet based on the latest learning theory, clearly aligned with standards adopted by the state, and subject to full documentation (as evidenced by student learning outcomes), and validity (as measured by standardized tests). Ultimately, those same standardized tests are used, in part, to determine a

teachers' productivity—even though the “raw materials” are not subject to strict “quality control” standards at the front end of the process.

As a society we have come to question the purpose and the quality of our public schools. In years gone by we deemed it important for children to learn how to read and to cipher for their own betterment and, in the final analysis, for the betterment of society and the sustenance of our great democratic experiment. There were strong bonds and great pride between the public school and the constituents it served. Now we engage in open enrollment, e-schools, and charter schools designed, ostensibly, to provide the best educational opportunities for the individual student, but leaving behind a collective gap in that esprit de corps that once bound together our public schools, our communities, and our greater society. The very fabric of our shared experience used to be woven within the context of our public school—the first and last time that we learned together, ate together, and played together in the same sandbox of life—where memories were made, experiences were shared, and empathy was created.

Therefore, with this legislation, let us seek to celebrate public education—as it was, as it is, and as it ought to be. Thomas Jefferson valued public education as a means to promote a civic society and, by extension, democracy itself. The framers of the Land Ordinance of 1785 provided a rudimentary framework to fund public education to match that vision. And the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, in what could be called a mission statement, clearly outlined the intentions of the framers in the following phrase: “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”

My fellow members of the Education Committee, HB 438 seeks to do just that: to encourage public education, to affirm its purpose during one week in November, and by so doing, to send a message to our students, our teachers, and our communities that we support their efforts and believe in their mission to promote the happiness of mankind and the sustenance of good government.

Thank you for time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.