

HB 498

My name is Heather Keck. I am the President of the Hilliard Board of Education and a prosecuting attorney. As such, I see two important facets of this Bill: the legal perspective and the School District impact. Ultimately, I believe that HB 498 can be a powerful tool for school districts, while still allowing for local control in how the policy is crafted. From the legal perspective, it is not easy to prosecute a case in which there is only a verbal threat of harm – especially where that threat is not made directly to its intended recipient. Frankly, I appreciate the balancing act that lawmakers must consider: weighing a person’s first amendment freedoms with the likelihood of that person carrying out their stated illegal conduct. However, I believe HB 498 builds in specific protections for any First Amendment concerns by requiring not just that a threat occurs, but also that the student take a substantial step toward completion of their crime. In this way, the public policy concerns should be quite satisfied that these actions constitute more than “just talk” and yet, it doesn’t require a district to wait for either the act to be carried out or a criminal conviction before removing a student from campus.

Through the lens of a parent and School District representative, it's easy to want this Bill to go farther and provide an even greater reduced burden on the prosecution of any minor who, regardless of age, threatens the safety of our student body. We’ve all seen the aftermath of school shootings and the millions of people questioning “why” and “how” something could have occurred without someone putting a stop to it. This Bill puts us a step closer to being able to have that intervening moment that may just keep an entire school of children safer. Allowing not just the removal of a threatening student from campus, but also allowing the district to require a mental health assessment prior to that student’s return might just allow us to catch the next Columbine before it occurs. If we can accomplish that, while still ensuring the Constitutional rights of the accused youths, then we should take the opportunity to move forward with this Bill.