

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Minority Member Fedor, and distinguished members of the House Education Committee.

My name is John Marschhausen and I am the Superintendent of the Hilliard City School District. I am honored to have the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 498 - School Expulsion - Threats of Violence.

School violence, and threats of violent in our schools, has become an all too frequent reality in our world today. Furthermore, in today's instant media and information age, threats of violence have undermined confidence in our collective ability to maintain an appropriate educational and learning environment. School threats in our world today are media events - not only requiring significant school and law enforcement resources - but depriving thousands of students the ability to learn and safely attend our schools.

Thanks to the work of Senator Hughes, Hilliard Chief of Police Fisher, Representative Kunze, and many other leaders from the political, mental health, law enforcement, and education communities HB 498 provides local school districts another tool in our efforts to keep our school safe for teaching and learning.

This bill provides local control; it gives local school boards an option. This bill only applies to students who have threatened violence or acts of violence against the school, a student, or groups of students within the school setting. It gives local districts the ability to exclude a student from the traditional school setting if school officials require a mental health evaluation before the student returns to school.

If the district chooses, the district may provide the mental health evaluation. Hilliard has a contract with counseling service providers; in our case we would be willing to provide the evaluation by a licensed professional. If parents would prefer to use a private, licensed mental health professional that is the parent's option but then it would be at the parent's expense. This would not be for all students that threaten violence; it is only for those students that the district feels require an additional safeguard before returning to the traditional school setting.

In Hilliard we currently have a number of students that we, as a district and law enforcement officials, have exhausted disciplinary and corrective measures. As professionals we have requested that parents agree to an evaluation; as school officials we have deep concerns about the warning signs for potential violent actions. These students have either threatened violence or acted violently during this current school year. When parents refuse the evaluation; the school has no recourse. We desperately want to get needed help for these students if help is necessary, but we are currently unable to ascertain the mental state of the student.

Finally, this bill does not exclude the student from continuing his or her education. Again, this is a local control bill; if the district chooses to exclude the student for an extended time period alternative educational options will be provided. As a superintendent I believe all children should be educated. Unfortunately there are some situations where the safest educational environment may not be the traditional school or classroom setting. Under this proposed legislation, the district would be required to continue the child's education.

My hope is that this bill will increase the number of young people in our schools that receive mental health services and can continue on the path to successful adults and flourish in Ohio's classrooms. This is simply an additional tool that is optional for school districts to consider when acting to keep our schools safe.