WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

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Senator Lehner and fellow members of the committee:

Thank you for having me today. My name is Dr. Jason Fruth of 3640 Colonel Glenn Hwy, Dayton, OH 45435 and I come as an interested party representing Wright State University and our College of Education and Human Services.

First and foremost, I want to thank the committee for their consideration of HB 410 and changes to the current Truancy laws for the state of Ohio – and namely, dismissing the ridiculous notion that the solution for students missing school is *less school*. Making these changes represents our legislature utilizing science for solutions. This procedure is something our over 100,000 Ohio public school teachers are familiar with – recognizing a strategy is not working and utilizing research to find a better way. Since, as we know, executing retribution on students for missing school does *not* decrease truancy.

However, while stopping an ineffective policy for dealing with truancy once it has already occurred, this bill in its current form stops short of providing schools and communities with the tools and resources to address the underlying issues that lead to truancy to begin with.

Through our integrated health research at Wright State University, we have identified the issues that lead to truancy:

- Problematic behavior in the classroom
- Negative interactions with the teacher
- Poor reading and math performance and experience
- Experiences with bullying
- Lack of friendships
- Deteriorated home relationships
- Violent injuries and nurse's office visits
- Juvenile criminal activity
- Clinical psychiatric diagnoses
- Alcohol and illegal drug use

These underlying causes are what our schools, especially those in greatest distress, need help alleviating – not truancy itself, but the underlying causes. The bill in its current form offers interventions to these issues once school is being missed. However, in many cases these interventions are insufficient and in *all* cases, they are too late; as the issues leading to truancy are negatively impacting the child's education and lifetime outcome probabilities.

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At this time, I have to provide you with an inconvenient truth. This inconvenient truth has led to Wright State University providing programming in numerous communities and agencies in 17 states and four countries. The truth is, we have an evidence-based answer for *preventing* the issues I just mentioned. Not just addressing them once we have an indication that they are present but actually preventing their occurrence before they begin.

At Wright State University we train pre-service and in-service elementary teachers on the trauma-informed, universal preventive intervention called the PAX Good Behavior Game and also partner with schools to coach and develop their implementation for robust results in addition to researching and evaluating its effects.

This system has utterly changed classroom and lifetime outcomes for children and comes recommended by

- The Institute of Medicine in the 2009 IOM Report on Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services' Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices
- Johns Hopkins University with 30 years of ongoing longitudinal study
- Washington State Institute for Public Policy revealing a 54:1 return on investment for communities implementing the PAX Good Behavior Game.

Schools right here in Ohio are partnering with WSU to successfully implement this strategy into daily classroom practices to prevent the causes of truancy. Because when this is implemented:

- Classrooms demonstrate a 70% decrease in problematic behavior like Saville Elementary in Riverside, Ohio [1-6].
- Students have significantly fewer negative teacher interactions resulting in a 60% decrease in office visits like in like Shaw Elementary in Beavercreek, Ohio [4,7-9].
- Statistically significant increases in reading and math scores as demonstrated in Licking and Knox County, Ohio [10,11].
- Significantly fewer instances of bullying in and out of school like Trotwood Madison Schools near Dayton, Ohio [4].
- Significantly more reported friendships at school like Xenia Community Schools [4,5].
- Improved home climate like those throughout Allen, Auglaize, and Hardin Counties [12].
- Fewer violent injuries and nurse's office visits in elementary and middle school [13,14].
- Fewer arrests and less criminal activity through adolescence and adulthood [15-17].
- Fewer psychiatric disorders through adolescence [16,18].
- 50% less drug and alcohol use through adolescence and adulthood [19,20].

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All these outcomes that we know are the underlying causes of truancy from executing trauma-informed prevention in the elementary classroom. All this is why I am here today. It is why I have trained over 2,000 Ohio teachers in this life-saving intervention. It is why I have embedded this evidence-based strategy into the pre-service coursework for all Wright State University teachers candidates. It is why I have partnered with agencies as large as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, our own Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Nationwide Children's Hospital, and as small as the Madison County Juvenile Courts and even private donations from concerned citizens.

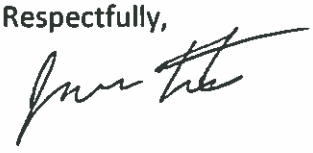
The results of this intervention are my inconvenient truth. And now this inconvenient truth is yours, because *now* you know. 20 years ago, we only had problems. We did not have answers, but now we do. We have proof in the research that I have provided along with my testimony today.

For just *3%* of what the legislature will save the taxpayers of Ohio by dismissing bad policy that attempted to prosecute tens of thousands of truancy cases each year, Wright State University could instead train thousands of Ohio teachers in this system and provide schools and communities with the tools to *prevent* the issues that lead to truancy. In doing so, they will have the resources to prevent much more than that.

With this bill, you have followed the science and found that prosecuting those missing school was not working. You have asked for the collection of pertinent data to dictate next steps. I implore you to continue to recognize the science and provide our schools and communities with what *does* work unequivocally and proven through research.

Help us reconcile an inconvenient truth that we now share. Help us save all our kids.

Respectfully,



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