VOICES FOR OHIO'S CHILDREN

Ohio Senate Education Committee

September 27, 2016

Proponent Testimony on HB 410

Witness: Brandi Slaughter
Contact information:
33 North Third Street, Suite 420, Columbus, OH 43215;
614-940-4248; brandi@raiseyourvoiceforkids.org

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice-Chair Hite, Ranking Member Sawyer, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony today in support of HB 410. My name is Brandi Slaughter and I am the CEO of Voices for Ohio's Children, a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to making Ohio the best place to be a kid. Voices advocates for policies that maximize a child's life chances by ensuring all of Ohio's 2.6 million children are safe, healthy, educated, connected, and employable.

Education is key to a child enjoying a bright future. We all know that kids who finish high school are more likely to experience success in college, career, and overall wellbeing.[1] Meanwhile, youth who don't finish school are three times more likely to live in poverty, more likely to get caught up in the justice system, and can expect to make half a million dollars less than their diploma-holding peers over their lifetime.[2] Of course, beyond securing economic well-being, preventing juvenile justice system involvement and crime, and saving taxpayer dollars, ensuring children stay in school promotes their cognitive and social well-being. The very act of attending and participating in school influences a child's development in profound ways. This is especially true for very young children, which is where I want to focus my attention today.

While Voices for Ohio's Children is supportive of amended HB 410 in its entirety, I specifically wanted to address the new amendment that eliminates the use of out- of-school suspensions and expulsions for kids in third grade or younger. Ohio children between the ages of 4 and 8 were the subjects of nearly 30,000 suspensions and expulsions in the 2014-2015 school year. These experiences are embarrassing, discouraging, and stressful at any age, but they produce particularly negative impacts on very young children whose rapidly developing brains are

[1] Meacham, Jon. (April 12, 2012). U.S. Education Reform and National Security: Report of a CFR-Sponsored Independent Task Force.
[2] Rumberger, R. W., (January 24, 2012). America cannot afford a stiff price of a dropout nation.

heavily influenced by experience. Early childhood represents a stage of enhanced brain plasticity that is particularly vulnerable to the long-term effects of stress; prolonged exposure can even result in altering typical neural pathways and organization of the young brain.[3] A recent Policy Statement Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings jointly released by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services identifies additional impacts of suspension and expulsion on young children including hindered social-emotional and behavioral development and delayed identification and diagnosis of disabilities and/or mental health issues.[4] Alternatively, young children's access to supportive, attentive, and sensitive adult care—such as that they receive in school—plays a vital role in buffering and protecting the developing brain from potentially harmful effects of stressors.[5] As these young students age, school continues to play a vital role in their development. Not only do schools provide kids with the essentials of math, reading, science and history, they also teach them how to function in society; how to interact with their peers, with adults who aren't their parents, with people who are different. Students learn how to think critically, how to argue without fighting, and how to take risks—all in a safe environment.

Knowing this, it becomes imperative for us as parents, community stakeholders, and as a society to do everything we can to make sure kids don't miss school. HB 410 takes the important step of establishing a case-by-case approach to addressing truancy and school discipline. Every child is unique and there is a wide-range of mental and physical health, personal, familial, economic, and cultural factors that influence his/her absence from school. Identifying the root cause early and through a team approach with family involvement will help keep kids on track for graduation and a bright future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 410. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have.

---

[3] Gunnar, M.R., Herrera, A., & Hostinar, C.E. (2009). Stress and Early Brain Development. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*.

[4] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education. (N.D.) POLICY STATEMENT ON EXPULSION AND SUSPENSION POLICIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS. Retrieved September 23, 2016 from https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf

[5] Ibid.