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Committees:
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Senate Bill 126 Sponsor Testimony
Senate Education Committee
November 29th, 2016

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Hite, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present Senate Bill 126. This legislation calls for the Department of Education to conduct a comprehensive study of the economic, educational and social effect of open enrollment in our state and submit its findings to the General Assembly. Pending review of the report, the General Assembly is tasked with modifying the program as needed or ending it altogether by December 31st, 2017.

The open enrollment policy in Ohio allows a student from one district to enroll in another. The roots of interdistrict open enrollment date back to a pilot project created by the General Assembly in 1989. Originally this experiment allowed open enrollment only from adjacent districts. However, Senate Bill 55 of the 122nd General Assembly expanded the policy to give school districts the option of either a statewide open enrollment policy, an adjacent district open enrollment policy, or no policy whatsoever. This policy stands as current law today.

No state-level research has ever been conducted on the actual effects of open enrollment on equity, school funding, or academic achievement. It is my opinion that a pilot program should not continue for 24 years without a comprehensive study of whether the program was effective in achieving its stated goals.

In HB 59 (the FY 14/15 budget) the Governor established the Open Enrollment Task Force to review and make recommendations on open enrollment by December 31, 2013. While this was a laudable undertaking, the goals of the Open Enrollment Task Force differed from my legislation in several key ways. Senate Bill 126 places an emphasis on examining the effect of open enrollment on the poorest districts in the state and tasks the Department of Education to:

- Investigate the consequences of requiring each school district to maintain an adjacent district or statewide open enrollment policy;
- Compare the fiscal and administrative effects of counting open enrollment students where those students are educated versus counting students where they reside;
- Consider other funding model alternatives;
- Examine whether an amount representing only the state share of funding should be transferred to a school district that enrolls open enrollment students, if students continue to be counted where they reside.

Senate Bill 126 also requires the Department of Education to submit a report of its findings to the General Assembly. After review, the General Assembly must decide whether to retain the current open enrollment policy, modify it, or repeal it by December 31st, 2017. The Governor's Task Force's report was submitted on December 31st, 2013, but it is my belief that their research simply didn't go far enough.

This legislation will take a more comprehensive look at open enrollment than the Governor's Task Force. It will also require the General Assembly to take legislative action on open enrollment by a date certain, which the Governor's task force did not do. For these reasons, I ask that you take strong consideration of SB 126. Again, I am grateful for the opportunity to present this bill to the committee, and would be happy to entertain any questions that you may have.