Mike Hebenthal, Superintendent, Centerburg Local School District.

Chairman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, members of the Senate education sub-committee, my name is Mike Hebenthal, Superintendent of Centerburg Local School District located in Knox County. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 216.

Centerburg Local School District is a rural school district with approximately 1200 students from preschool through 12th grade. I fully support SB 216 but my testimony today is specifically in reference to teacher licensure, reporting mandates and college credit plus book fees.

Being a rural district, finding substitute teachers is very difficult. Because our county is small and rural our substitute teachers are approved by the Educational Service Center, the local school boards then shared by all the districts in the county. There are many days we have absences in our staff and cannot find substitutes. Either administrators cover or we try to piece together coverage by using staff during their state mandated preparation periods. Substitutes generally do not teach the content because of lack of subject knowledge or lack of knowledge of the student’s abilities. The current requirements and restrictions placed on substitute teachers are unnecessary and add to excess costs due to lack of substitutes and/or lack of productivity of the other staff. There are many residents of our district that would make an excellent substitute teacher but may not have the required college courses. They would be an excellent substitute, are caring and intelligent, and would serve the students well. Larger districts sometimes employ substitutes full time knowing they will have staff absent every day. In small districts employment in this manner would be a waste of taxpayer funds. Due to these facts I ask that you support this part of SB 216.

Consolidation of reporting mandates is long overdue. Over the past 10 years schools have seen an explosion of mandates and reporting. I assume this reporting is needed, although sometimes I question the need for some of the information. To bring all this reporting together or to at least group mandates into same subject mandates is just a good idea. This type of reporting is usually completed through the Ohio Department of Education Security Application for Enterprise or SAFE accounts. I have seen the number of tabs and applications within SAFE grow exponentially over the past 10 yrs. Just trying to find out where the document is housed is tough. I have come to the opinion that reporting criteria are all crated independent of each other so each has, what I believe, to be excess information requirements. I think this is because each application becomes a program unto itself rather than just gather the needed information. Schools spend hours and hours each year reporting information, which ultimately takes away from serving the students.

Finally I ask the committee to seriously look at the process of book and supply purchases for College Credit Plus. I am a huge proponent of college credit plus. The ability for out advanced students to attend college level classes while still in high school is a great concept and serves our community well. With that in mind I find the cost of textbooks to be inflated and a burden on the local taxpayer. When I purchase textbooks for our school I pay approximately $120 per book and it lasts around five to eight years. College texts are in the hundreds of dollars per course and are good for one semester. We did attempt to create a book repository and try to use the same books over to help reduce costs but the constant changing of books by colleges or students attending many different institutions made it more cost effective to sell them back for thirty percent of the original costs. I currently pay a staff member a stipend to gather the book information for each student’s course and try to find the most cost effective way to purchase it. Many of the frustrations are when a college states a book is suggested but not mandatory or when a student tells us we bought the book as required but it was never used. I personally think the bill should require the colleges to pay half, which may make them question their requirements. Having students pay half will also help with families deciding if the class they are taking is going to be helpful in the future rather than just taking something to get an easy credit.

I thank Sen. Huffman for his work on this bill. It is long overdue and I hope just a start to try to make common sense adjustments to an ever-growing burden being placed on education.

Thank you for your time and I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.