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OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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Senate Education Committee

House Bill 21 - Proponent Testimony

Good afternoon Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am Matthew Dotson with the Ohio Education Association's (OEA) Government Relations Division. On behalf of the OEA's 125,000 members, I thank you for this opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of House Bill 21.

Under Ohio law, per-pupil charter school deductions come from funds allocated to the school district in which a charter student resides. Further, state law assigns local school districts the responsibility for monthly verifying to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) the accuracy of charter student residency claims. This process is inefficient and ineffective because the ability of school districts to administer this duty is inherently limited. House Bill 21 seeks to address this problem with common sense solutions.

The bill would require charter schools, instead of school districts, to verify for ODE the resident school district of charter students upon enrollment and on an annual basis. School districts retain the right to dispute student residency claims made by charter schools.

These improvements to the residency verification process for charter students will better ensure that school districts are not paying for students who do not live in their districts.

Under the current system, school districts face many significant challenges in effectively verifying charter student residency for ODE:

- A school district may request proof of student residency from a charter school, but the charter school may not always provide the necessary documents;
- A charter student is not required to enroll in a school district before enrolling in a charter school, therefore, the school district may have had no contact with the student for whom it must verify residency;



- School districts can lose contact with formerly enrolled students if they are not notified of subsequent changes in residency;
- Charter schools may adopt a different, and possibly lower, standard of documentation to prove residency than is used by a school district;
- In the event of an unresolved disagreement as to which school district a student is entitled to attend, Ohio law allows **only** the charter school to present the matter to the superintendent of public instruction for resolution. OEA requests that the Senate consider an amendment to fix this one-sided dispute resolution process by allowing both the charter school or the school district to seek dispute resolution with the state superintendent. (RC 3314.11(G); HB 21 lines 440-451)

As an example of the challenges faced by local school districts, **Superintendent Linda Reid of South Euclid Lyndhurst Schools (SEL)** pointed to some of the problems with charter student residency verification in her testimony on HB 64 (biennial budget; 131st G.A.) before the House Finance – Education Subcommittee in March 2015:

Superintendent Linda Reid - South Euclid Lyndhurst Schools (SEL) - HB 64 testimony, House Finance Subcommittee - Primary and Secondary Education, March 5, 2015; excerpt:

“In SEL we adhere to strict enrollment procedures that minimize fraud and ensure that the students we educate are residents of the community. In comparison, we found, the majority of registration procedures for the charter schools attended by SEL residents lacked strict guidelines and in many cases had not detailed registration requirements. Two of the most popular charter schools that students in our district attend, one on-line, the other a “brick and mortar” school have no detailed requirements for residency verification.

The SEL Scenario in tracking students attending charter schools

Our pupil services’ department works to identify students attending charter schools that reside in SEL and thereby receiving SEL funding. An important activity is sending a letter to families to verify residency. Additionally, we send electronic inquiries to the charter schools to verify (or dispute) students who are not on their school roster. The process is VERY time-consuming as it requires on-going and regular review and follow-up with the parent, charter schools and the courts (if custody or placement issues are present) to “catch” and correct discrepancies in a timely manner. If a student NEVER attended an SEL school, the verification process is more complicated because we must accept the student as an SEL funded student attending a charter school; the responsibility is on us (the district) to dispute residency. Finally, with the 105 hour rule, a student could log-on ONE TIME and we (the district) are chartered for 105 hours UNLESS the student withdraws from the charter school.

The tracking system just described is even more daunting in school districts with high student mobility rates. We find that many of our students enroll late and fail to

complete one year of schooling. In addition to the financial implications for public school districts, we must address the negative impact of missed, lost and gaps in instruction when the student returns to the public school district.”

In summary, a more fair and logical system is needed.

OEA supports the intent of House Bill 21 to make charter student residency verification more accurate and efficient so that it serves the educational interests of school districts, charter schools, students and taxpayers.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues. I am available for any questions you may have.