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Standing Committees

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**Senate Bill 276**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Chairwoman Lehner**  
**Sponsor Testimony – Senator Jay Hottinger**  
**June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 276.

School safety is a huge issue in our state and our nation, and while we never want to hear of violence or threats in our schools, the unfortunate reality is that we are seeing it in the news all too often. Senate Bill 276 would strengthen the ability of Ohio's school districts to address dangerous behaviors among students. This is a reintroduction of House Bill 334 that I jointly sponsored in the 130<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and stems from a local incident that was brought to my attention by Superintendent David Hile of Licking Valley Schools.

Under current law, a student must commit a serious violation of the school's code of conduct before a school superintendent can expel the student for the remainder of the semester. While this is a useful tool for superintendents to use for students violating the school's code, it does not adequately address students who threaten to harm school personnel or other students. I firmly believe that schools should be equipped to address threats *before* any harmful action takes place. Nobody wants to find themselves in a situation where an act of violence is committed and they are then faced with the question "What could we have done to prevent this?" This legislation will provide school administrators with the ability to not only remove a student from the classroom, but to ensure they are receiving the help they need to overcome their aggressive behavior.

Specifically, Senate Bill 276 would permit school boards to authorize their superintendent to expel students up to 180 days for actions that pose an imminent and severe endangerment to the health and safety of other pupils or school employees. Additionally, Senate Bill 276 helps get to the underlying problems of troubled youth by addressing mental health issues.

Under this bill, upon expulsion of the student, the superintendent would create conditions for that student to satisfy before returning to school. One of the conditions is a mental health assessment to determine if the student poses a threat to themselves, other students or school employees. This assessment would be done by a psychiatrist, psychologist or a school psychologist. This assessment would provide parents with the direction and referrals that they need to get the appropriate mental health treatment for their child.

Concerning the educational needs of the expelled student, the superintendent must consult with the student and the parents to develop a plan for the continued education of the student. This will ensure the student's educational requirements are still being met even though they are under expulsion. The plan may provide for instruction at home, enrollment in another school or education by the district in an alternative setting.

At the end of the expulsion period, the superintendent must assess the student to determine whether conditions have been met and the student has shown sufficient rehabilitation to be reinstated. If the superintendent determines the student has not shown sufficient rehabilitation, the superintendent may extend the expulsion.

Giving superintendents a greater ability to expel students for threatening actions will help prevent tragic events from happening in Ohio schools. By providing a mental health assessment and ensuring the student's education will continue during expulsion, Senate Bill 276 will help rehabilitate and educate troubled youth and give them the positive direction they need.

Chairwoman Lehner and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 276. I am happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.