**Written Testimony for Senate Finance Subcommittee K-12 Education Hearing for Week of May 22nd**

My name is Sarah Cordingley, and I am an English teacher at the South-Western Career Academy in Grove City, Ohio. I am a third-year teacher, and I just completed Year 3 of the Resident Educator Program. I feel that the marginal benefits I gained from participating in the program did not outweigh the detrimental costs to new teachers, to our families, and most importantly, to our students.

Over the course of completing the summative assessment (RESA), I wrote and submitted more than 60 pages of documentation. I spent a total of 81 hours outside of school on the tasks, but that final number is unrepresentative of the total amount of thought-space that the RESA occupied in my mind this past year. If I were to calculate how much time I spent thinking about how I would execute each step of the RESA during my daily commute or in the shower, I suspect that number would likely triple. From November through February, it consumed most of my existence. At one point, I realized that I hadn’t had a creative thought apart from RESA in several weeks. My fuel for designing interesting and engaging lessons for my students had dried up completely.

The stress from working on the task also took a toll on me, both physically and mentally. In early November, I visited my doctor with symptoms of intense dizziness and fatigue. She diagnosed me with depression, and she suggested that I consider going back on medication. Ultimately, I decided not to go that route because I had taken similar drugs in the past for depression, and I feared that the side effects would cripple me. Last time, while my brain was adjusting to the medication, I found that I was unable to think clearly for several weeks. I decided I couldn’t risk it, because the deadlines for RESA were absolute and firm. I felt certain that mental health problems would probably not be grounds for an extension. After all, what reasonable person wouldn’t feel stressed after spending 81 hours outside of school on a task tied to a professional license? Over the course of the year, I also gained almost ten pounds. I stopped exercising completely, and I abandoned most of the activities that brought me joy outside of work. When I consider what happened to my work-life balance and my health, it is virtually no wonder to me that research studies indicate that many teachers leave the profession after only three to five years.

The RESA also posed significant challenges for my family. My husband Michael essentially turned into a single parent for our two-year-old son Edward while I worked. I had been warned by other new teachers who had submitted the RESA that I should “kiss my family goodbye” this year, and that I’d get to “see them in February.” That wasn’t hyperbole, unfortunately. The RESA also impacted my family planning situation. After another new teacher advised me not to be pregnant during the RESA because of the stress, Michael and I decided that we would delay having a second child until I had passed at least 3 out of 4 sections. Now that I’ve gone through the summative, I can say that I would make the same recommendation to any other female teacher in this situation. When I consider what I physically went through from November to February, I am not sure I would have been able to cope. My last pregnancy ended in stress-related pre-eclampsia. While I feel like I made the right call, I feel a little sad. Edward will probably be four by the time we have another child. We hadn’t wanted our children to be spaced that far apart. We made that decision based solely on the RESA.

The RESA also made me less effective as an English teacher this year. I cut corners in order to carve out time. I assigned more multiple choice exams, which could be graded by computer, and far fewer essays. One stack of essays took me six weeks to grade, and one other, I quietly hid in a filing cabinet. I told the students that I was still working on them when they asked after them, and eventually they stopped asking. I still feel a deep sense of shame over that. Looking back, I don’t see how I could have done better, though. I had so little time remaining at the end of each day, there was nothing left of me to give.

I suspect that the Resident Educator Program was probably created with the best of intentions, but its benefits were scant compared with what I could get just from talking to other teachers and administrators at my school. Even my first year in the program, which was far more manageable, left me frustrated. My mentor and I were required to choose things to work on that were aligned with the seven areas of the RESA, but what I really needed help with--classroom management, organizational strategies, and year-long planning--wasn’t directly listed in any of those areas. My mentor interpreted this to mean that we were not officially supposed to be working on those skills, so we ended up focusing on other “problem areas” that I didn’t feel much need to work on instead. Teachers are trained in their university pedagogy programs to reflect constantly on their teaching. I felt frustrated at how little the RE program seemed oriented toward my needs as a reflective new teacher.

Despite my intense frustration, I feel stronger for having gone through the RE program. While I haven’t gotten my scores back yet, I feel like I’ve achieved something in the end. On days when I allowed myself to feel cynical, I imagined that the true purpose of the RESA was to weed out the sort of teachers who just want to show movies instead of teach--the kind who went into the profession for the time off during the summer. I imagined that whoever created it expected that it would be hard enough to keep only the most dedicated of teachers in the classroom--a kind of professional hazing, if you will. I heard from other teachers that burnout was a common side effect from the assessment--almost as if “good teachers” are supposed to be immune to stress--and I imagined that someone was testing me, trying to see if I would burn out, too. But even after all I went through this year, I still want to be a teacher. I still love working with students, and I still get excited to create amazing, engaging lessons that will drive my students toward success. If RESA was meant to break me and make me question whether I really want to do this job, then I feel like I achieved victory this year.

But this is a victory with a hollow medal for me. No teacher should have to go through what I (and so many others) went through this year. This is not the way to make teachers better at what they do, or to make our students more successful. We already ask a great deal of pre-service teachers in university programs and of licensed teachers through OTES. Many excellent individuals are leaving the profession in droves already. And I have not met a single teacher yet who believes that the RESA helps more than it hurts. Give new teachers the space and time to work with mentors, colleagues, and administrators on the areas they feel they need the most help with. Allow them to engage in reflective conversation with these people, without asking them to create mounds of paperwork. This is what helped me the most during these past three years, and it is what I believe will help people who are new to the profession.

As currently written, the language of HB49, Section 733.60, on page 4619, would eliminate the RESA. Please support this cut, and consider replacing it with a paperwork-free mentoring program. Thank you.