**Senate Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee of Finance**

**Testimony on Am. Sub. H.B. 49**

**May 25, 2017**

**Dr. Jan Osborn, Superintendent, Putnam County ESC**

Chairman Hite, Vice Chair Sykes, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Dr. Jan Osborn. I have worked for the Putnam County Educational Service Center for the past forty-three years. I am in my twenty-fifth year as the superintendent of the ESC. Today, I am testifying in favor or the amendment that would not cut ESC funding, but would hold the current ESC funding harmless.

Today, I am very nervous as well as anxious about testifying. I have testified for the last four, if not the last five budgets in favor of increasing ESC funding, or at a minimum not cutting our funding. To date, my testimony does not appear to have made a positive difference for ESC funding.

With my long history working in an ESC, my passion for ESCs and my belief in the important work that we do is still steadfast. While I have watched ESC funding experience cuts with each biennium budget since 2007, our ESC has still managed to do our important work for our nine local school districts and the children of Putnam County. We are the smallest single county ESC in the state. We serve nine local districts and approximately 6,000 students.

Over twenty years ago a very wise state senator by the name of Bob Cupp said to me, “We have infinite need and limited resources. Where should we invest our resources?”

My response twenty years ago, as it is today is, Invest in your Educational Services Centers.

In our testimony for the last biennium budget we were asked by legislatures to respond to four statements. I believe that all four statements are still relevant today. The first statement was whether **“state funding is a minor part of ESC funding”.** The state operating subsidy, while becoming a smaller percentage of our overall revenue stream is NOT a minor part of our funding by our choice. These funds allow us to keep our doors open so that we can continue to serve the state and our school districts. I would like to point out that state funding is NOT a minor portion of ESC funding by our choice.

From 1914 to approximately 2001 state law mandated county commissioners to furnish the original County Boards of Education and then later Educational Services Centers free office space and equipment. The Ohio General Assembly in I believe 2001 past a law stating the county commissioners no longer needed to provide ESCs free space. The commissioners could then phase-in a rental fee over the next five years. In 2006 our county commissioners offered to rent our ESC the same office space that we had previously occupied for twenty years for free for a rental cost of $60,926 annually. Today, in 2016-17, if we would have stayed in our old 6,000 square foot county office space, just the $60,926 rental cost estimate in 2006 dollars without office equipment and ongoing office expenses, would consume over 38% of our current $158,301 total state funding.

Also, I would like to point out that ESCs have never qualified for any state support for obtaining and/or building ESC facilities. Our ESC, in the spirit of entrepreneurship, partnered with the Village of Ottawa. In 2006 we opened-up a 29,000 square foot ESC/Skill Training Center dedicated to enhance economically development within Putnam County. From 2006 until the present, not one dollar for the cost of the building has been charged to any Putnam County School.

Hopefully, my last comment regarding either ESC funding or expense relate to the following point. In the future, ESCs are being asked to consult local school districts regarding the use and expenditure of the $158,301 our ESC receives in state funding. I can attest that total state funding amount does not cover our current building expense nor our operating costs for such items as audits, legal fees, insurance, internet, computer/printer costs, board fees, etc.

What does the State of Ohio receive back for investing $158,301 in the Putnam County ESC? Our staff secures additional funding resources. Our annual budget previously was over nine million dollars. Currently our annual budget is about 7.1 million dollars. Our current state funding represents about 2.2 percent of our budget. Nevertheless, the state operating funds are critically important.

In our ESC/Skilled training Building we rent classrooms for university classes and also to Apollo Career Center. We lease offices to the Ohio Department of Education, The Putnam County Developmental Disabilities Board, Mercy Health, Sylvan, a dance studio, and a private investment firm.

Two weeks ago we held the first Putnam County Job Fair in our facility.

Three hundred and fifty students and one hundred and eighty adults attended the job fair hosted by over thirty potential employers.

The largest component of our ESC is special education programs and services for our local schools. Our ESC has 96 full-time employees and we have approximately eighty teachers, speech therapists, school psychologists, OT/PTs and aides working on out in our local schools. This current year we saved our local districts over $224,000 just on the employment of classroom aides. This is consistent with the statutory requirement that ESCs provide oversight and coordination of all cooperative special education programs.

We also operate four 5 Star Step Up To Quality Public Preschools as well as three Twenty First Century afterschool grant programs in our local schools. Our general education consultants provide Resident Educator training, staff development, technology training, grant writing, county-wide art, band, and choir programs along with the county-wide science fair.

We provide shared services such as our ESC treasurer and his assistant, who are also the treasurer and treasurer assistant for Miller City Local Schools. Our ESC is the fiscal agent and we provide office space for the Putnam County Family and Children’s First Council and the County Help Me Grow program.

We offer summer programs for migrant children as well as summer speech, special education, STEM, and tech camps. Also this summer we are starting our first Summer Food Service Program meal site at the Leipsic United Methodist Church for hungry children.

Our services go beyond Putnam County. One of the best examples is that we co-founded Project MORE (Mentoring in Ohio for Reading Excellence) in partnership with the executive director of the Ohio Coalition for Children with Disabilities based on funding from the Ohio General Assembly. It has grown from 12 schools in 1999 when it began to over 300 schools being trained to use Project MORE with a minimum of 137 school districts actively using the program. Project MORE is facilitated and managed by the Putnam County ESC. While Putnam County ESC services the smallest number of children in the state; we are impacting children in 58 counties through Project MORE. An example of the power of one-on-one mentoring is that one of our first schools has served 1050 students, utilized 1734 mentors, delivered 86,306 mentoring sessions, and logged 43,153 mentor hours and is still going strong since 1999. We are also fortunate to have a very successful partnership with the Ohio Department of Aging and the Ohio National Guard/Ohio Air Guard to provide mentors for Project MORE. These things are all made possible in part by the General Assembly’s support of ESCs.

I want to make one point about the value of volunteers. Trained volunteers can make a big difference in helping struggling readers to improve their reading. Currently, it is estimated that the value of a volunteer hour in Ohio is worth twenty-three dollars. I just mention that the reported volunteer hours for Project MORE volunteers in Leipsic was 43,153 hours. If we use the twenty-three dollar value for each volunteer hour, Project MORE at one school (Leipsic) over 12 years generated $992,519 in value in volunteer mentor hours. I hope that the success of Project MORE is an example that shows you the value of the State of Ohio investing $ 158,301 a year in the Putnam County ESC

Our vision is that we revisit the idea of shared services. We want to assist the Ohio Department of Education in rolling out their initiatives, but all parties must see the ESC as a viable partner in both action, words, and funding. However, ESCs are at a great disadvantage in that there are little or no funds for starting creative/innovative programs and no “spare” staff available to sub-contract with ODE for any of these projects. ESCs have the potential to work side-by-side in collaboration with other educational entities to better meet ongoing needs, as well as foster exciting and innovative ideas.

The Putnam County ESC is an efficient and effective organization providing a tremendous return on investment**. For every dollar received in state and local funding, the ESC obtains $17.66 in state and federal grants for client districts; this is well above the statewide average of $3.77.**

We sincerely hope that you will consider adequately funding ESCs so we can continue to provide quality educational experiences for all students.

I have been blessed to work for ESC school board members who based their decisions on just two questions. The first question is always, “Is the proposed idea good for children?” Second question is, “Can we pay for it”

If the answer is “Yes” to both questions, then we enthusiastically implement the idea! I hope that you all have the same philosophy.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our requests. Good luck and best wishes in answering Representative Cupp’s statement from twenty years ago, “We have infinite need and limited resources. Where should we invest our resources?” I hope that part of your response is to invest in our ESCs.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jan Osborn PhD, Superintendent

Putnam County Educational Service Center

5-25-2017