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**Senate Finance Committee  
Senate Bill 246  
Written Interested Party Testimony  
Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators  
April 10, 2018**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Julie Davis, and I serve as the Executive Director for the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators.

Our members are the building principals/education leaders for the public elementary schools around the state. They are among the people most affected by the provisions in proposed Senate Bill (SB) 246. Thank you for the opportunity to submit interested party testimony on their behalf and to share the perspective of the persons ultimately responsible for the discipline of our youngest students.

I want to begin by thanking the bill sponsors, Senator Lehner and Senator Manning, for the tireless work they have done in preparation for the introduction of SB 246. We appreciate being included in various interested party meetings and discussions about the proposal over the past several months. We think the proposal has benefited from the input provided by those members of the education community who are on the front lines on this issue.

Our organization strongly supports the overall goals spelled out by Senators Lehner and Manning for reducing the number of out of school suspensions for students who exhibit behavioral issues, particularly for our very young students. Our members understand that forcing students away from the educational environment for discipline purposes can be counter-productive. For some students, "school" is the safest and most structured place they can be, and suspensions sometimes make their emotional and behavioral issues worse. When discipline is needed, there may be other options that will have more positive results.

We are pleased, however, that the bill phases in its new requirements. Even though attempts are already being made to implement Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) in our schools, there are many other academic and procedural requirements districts must follow, and without additional resources, the implementation process can be slow. We appreciate provisions in the bill that would give assistance to some school districts in the implementation of PBIS. The \$2 million appropriation is a good first step in providing the necessary resources and specific support our buildings need to make these programs work. We hope this is a sign of more funding to come in future budgets.

One amendment to SB 246 we would like to see, is the inclusion of “other school staff” (i.e., principals) or a similar phrase, in the reference in the bill to the exceptions to the ban on suspensions for grades Kindergarten through third grade. The current language reads as follows:

“...as necessary to protect the immediate health and safety of the student, the student’s fellow classmates, or the classroom staff and teachers” (section 3313.668 (B)(1)(b)).

Our members often find that the violence exhibited by children does not end when they are removed from the classroom. Other staff may be at risk.

A concern members have raised about SB 246 is the new supervision requirements for in-school suspensions. Typically, an in-school suspension may mean the only place for the student is in the principal’s office, and the only staff available is the building secretary or the principal him/herself. We are hopeful that as PBIS programs are effectively implemented, the result will truly be a reduction in the number of incidences when suspensions of any kind are necessary. In the meantime, this section of the bill will present new challenges for some schools.

We stand ready to assist policy leaders in solving these challenges and in finding comprehensive solutions to the mental health and behavioral issues our students are experiencing. We believe concerns about poverty and the achievement gap as well as other school safety issues are intertwined with student discipline challenges. If we all work together, these complex issues can be addressed. Our members want to be part of the solution.

Thank you for considering our members as you continue to deliberate the provisions in SB 246. I should mention that we were hoping to have some association members here today to present in-person testimony, but because this happens to be a testing week, they were unable to do so. They asked that we pass along their willingness for continuing to work with Senators Lehner and Manning to make the bill the best it can be.