

Written Testimony
HB 305
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Submitted by: Felecia Evans

Minority Representative OAESA Board of Directors and Principal at Lander Elementary School

Dear Members of the House of Representatives, on behalf of the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 305.

I have been a public school educator in Ohio for 18 years, 13 of those years I have spent as a school administrator. I am also the mother of two children, ages 6 and 8, who proudly attend the Cleveland Public Schools. I currently serve as the Minority Representative on the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators. Our organization represents Ohio's Kindergarten through 8th grade school administrators and a part of our mission is to passionately advocate and support school leaders in creating effective schools for all their students and staff.

My testimony specifically addresses section 3317.25 (B), provisions 14 and 24 from the bill which allow for the use of funds from the disadvantaged pupil impact aid (DPIA). Provision number 14 permits DPIA funds to be applied towards district-wide professional development to provide greater insight into the needs, culture, and perspective of disadvantaged populations and the enhanced ability to recognize and address those needs.

Additionally, provision number 24 allows for funds to be allocated towards professional development in cultural competence. I hope to emphasize the importance of these items and encourage you to be more specific in requiring Districts to use these funds to support a comprehensive approach to eliminating racism and improve outcomes for students of color in Ohio. Furthermore, I hope to help the committee recognize that these funds are not only critical for school districts that serve economically disadvantaged students but all school districts need to incorporate a comprehensive approach into their school plans that addresses systemic racism and the underperforming of students of color.

There are many purposes of education, but certainly one priority is to prepare every student to be a full participant in democracy. Our schools can and should be the bedrock of our democracy and fertile ground for informed citizens. Unfortunately, for many students of color, the promise of this education is falling short. Students of color routinely perform lower on standardized tests than their white counterparts.

Furthermore, students of color are disproportionately suspended and expelled from schools at higher rates than their white counterparts. In no uncertain terms, students of color in Ohio are not benefiting equally from all that our great schools can offer, and this cycle of marginalization must stop.

While I do not purport to have the answers to ending systemic racism and the achievement gap in our education system, day in and day out, I watch amazing teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors and administrators work to create schools where children can learn and thrive. Especially in the midst of this pandemic, I have witnessed incredible bravery and commitment to our children's academic and social emotional needs. I do believe that it is critical that school districts be provided with the funds necessary to create a comprehensive strategy that includes identifying problems specific to their local community and implement research based solutions to address the structures that preserve racism and maintain the underperforming of students of color in our school systems.

I applaud the House for the work that you have done in creating a bill that works to fix the gaps in our school funding system. However, we must marry this with a commitment to fixing one of the largest issues our schools face. There are 25 different things that a school district will be allowed to spend their disadvantaged pupil impact aid towards, with a commitment to culture and cultural competence only being a small fraction of this. Professional development in cultural competence sounds good, but without a comprehensive plan to address the underperforming of our students of color and without the proper funds to support this, school districts will continue to fall short.

Moreover, schools with fewer students in poverty will receive less funding for these important initiatives. Regardless of the wealth of a school community, the underperforming of students of color is universal. I propose that the provisions for spending in the DPIA be condensed and focus more heavily on school districts working with their local communities to create a comprehensive plan to address the unequal outcomes of students of color in their schools that go beyond just professional development. Comprehensive plans should include audits of current practices, input from community members and an ongoing commitment to dismantling systemic inequity.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony, thank you for your service to our great State and thank you for taking on the vital task of repairing our school funding system to better benefit all of our children. Please feel free to contact me with questions about this testimony.