



**Representative Michele Lepore-Hagan  
58<sup>th</sup> House District**

**House Bill 529 Sponsor Testimony  
Economic and Workforce Development Committee  
Wednesday, November 18, 2020**

Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee we are grateful for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 529.

We are introducing HB 529 because the un-elected, unaccountable Academic Distress Commissions and appointed CEOs in Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland exercise unilateral control over tens of millions of taxpayer dollars. The performance audits mandated by the bill will enable parents, teachers, residents, elected officials and the public at large to evaluate whether those dollars are being used effectively. Most importantly, we will be able to determine if our teachers and kids are receiving the resources and support they need to achieve and succeed. The time to impose transparency and scrutiny on this failed system has arrived.

The CEO/ADC model and its failures transcend the school districts in Ohio who have been forced to make adjustments in this system void of transparency. For example, before 2017 the Youngstown City School District (YCSD) had a \$23 million surplus in its unreserved cash balance. A budget forecast done in May, 2020, prior to cuts being made, showed the district was facing a \$29 million deficit. This year's budget is \$2.4 million in the black, even after a \$1 million state funding cut. There is a fiscal concern of \$11 million irregularity.

This is merely a snapshot of the fiscal woes experienced by the YCSD. There has also been \$13 million less in classroom spending (46 of 46 in classroom spending in comparison to other districts) and either the removal or reduction of the following successful academic support programs and resources:

- Social Workers (eliminated)
- LLI tutoring (eliminated)
- Music (dramatically reduced)

- Band (dramatically reduced)
- Foreign language (dramatically reduced)
- AmeriCorps (eliminated)
- STEM (eliminated)
- 3-D printing (eliminated)
- Visual Arts (eliminated)
- Performing Arts (eliminated)
- Afternoon school programs for 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades (eliminated)

While vital programs that are essential to the student experience have taken a hit, YCSD has seen increases in spending. For example:

- Estimated \$4 million for legal services
- \$100,000 and more in salaries for each of 35 executive positions hired

Tough decisions in a struggling district would be understandable so long as they achieved the academic outcomes and experiences these children and staff desperately need. Unfortunately, that hasn't been the case in YCSD. In almost every category of academic performance, the district has scored lower than in years prior to the CEO/ADC model and state take over. Additionally:

- Average years in staff teaching experience dropped from 10 to 6 years
- K-12th grade enrollment has dropped

A board of education is beholden to voters when accounting for the spending of the district they are elected to. HB 70 removed any electoral accountability or public transparency in the spending of tax dollars. Notwithstanding the return to local control of these districts, a state audit would at the very least allow residents and tax payers to better understand the correlation between spending and achieving academic outcomes in these districts. The passage of HB 529 is essential to restoring the public's trust in the institution that is responsible for our most important social investment: children's education.

Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, we thank you again for this opportunity to testify on HB 529 and would be happy to answer any of your questions.