

Rep. Joe Miller

Sponsor Testimony – HB 529

11/18/20

Good morning Chair Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 529, which will require a full performance audit of schools with Academic Distress Commissions such as Lorain City Schools that sits in my district. I also want to thank my joint sponsor who could not make it today, Representative Lepore-Hagan, for her help on this legislation and her work in aiding the Academic Distress Commission controlled Youngstown City School District.

Sadly, it has come to our attention through discussions with teachers, parents, board members and some ADC members that accusations have been made and some evidence obtained that the operational, managerial and fiscal decision making powers assumed under HB70 has led the appointed CEO to make unscrupulous or unethical decisions at best or worse down right corrupt and destructive decisions that have adversely affected the students and teachers in the district. This model of a CEO with absolute power absent true oversight by an Academic Distress Commission has led to what many believe to be a corrupt CEO who misappropriated tax dollars and mistreated students and staff while creating for his friends overpaid administrative positions and showering them with non education related perks. Here is a list of grievances brought to my attention in the school district under state takeover in my district.

A snapshot of a staff survey provided these results:

- The district has provided enhanced curriculum including textbooks, teaching materials, software, and technology to support quality instruction
  - → 74% strongly disagree or disagree, 14% neutral
- Professional development opportunities have developed my instructional competence by producing data driven results of improved student learning outcomes
  - → 79% strongly disagree or disagree, 13% neutral
- The culture and climate throughout the district is positive, and I feel valued and respected as a teaching professional
  - 88% strongly disagree or disagree, 8% neutral
- Created a culture of fear and distrust throughout the district
- High school staff required to reapply for positions despite having been repeatedly denied basic essentials (ex: safety plans/drills, updated textbooks, teaching materials, attendance policy, etc)
- Slush fund of middle schoolers money → \$5 for lost student badge with no record of deposits.

- Former retired administrator fired from the district for falsifying time cards and is now working back in the district -- rehired under current administration
- Title I and tutor services removed from classroom instruction to support administrative salaries
- New purchased service vendor programs: Kickboard, Whetstone, ANET, Unbound, Engage New York are ineffective; with poor implementation and a lack of training → vendors are charter school affiliates of the CEO.
- \$43 million of general fund and Title I funds being appropriated in an unknown 598 account.
- Public Records Request policy violations with the response timeframe and handling public records requests. Members of the Lorain City public have conveyed their public records requests were being ignored going back to April and May 2019.
- Misappropriation of Public Funds involving the relocation reimbursements paid to Chief Schools Officer, in the total amount of \$15,959.89 (Check # 175113) The referenced Purchase Orders are #0402789 and #0402700. Documents in questions for reimbursement are:
  - Cashier checks to “2100 Center Rd Avon LLC” (2 @ \$2100.00 each, totaling \$4200.00) Check# 210154220 on 12/10/17 Check# 210154219 on 12/18/17  
No back up documentation was provided regarding this expenditure reimbursement
  - United Van Lines, LLC Invoice # (\$3708.19) does not include itemized receipts or itemized description list as compared to other moving companies back-up documents
  - Airbnb, Inc. (\$3976.16) 44 nights in a luxury condo in Washington DC, January 17-March 2, 2018

But how will we know if these claims of abuses of taxpayer dollars and disenfranchisement of a community's right of district oversight have been an effective model of school improvement? Has handing over the entire responsibility and power over the managerial, operational and financial well being of a school district provided a better educational experience for the students? There appears to be a pattern of behavior by CEO's under the state takeover model in both Lorain and Youngstown.

I strongly encourage my fellow committee members to support this legislation, as we owe it to our teachers, parents, and taxpayers across the state to get to the bottom of this issue and once and for all determine if the state takeover plan that put in place Academic Distress Commissions has been an abject failure and should be repealed. A performance audit by the Ohio Auditor will bring us closer to this answer. Thank you for your consideration.