Good afternoon Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee.

My name is Larry Ellis and I am the President of the Youngstown Education Association. I am here today to offer testimony in support of the Academic Distress Commission (ADC) language from HB 154 that has been included in HB 166 as passed by the House.

We are all aware that the state has completely taken over the Youngstown City School District since 2015. During that time the academic performance in Youngstown has not shown a significant increase and in fact has declined in areas that were showing improvement. Programs and support systems that were working and showing positive results were completely removed and replaced. Resources in the classrooms that directly impact our students were decreased to add more administration. Coaching and mentoring programs were eliminated, even though they were there to help teachers and students. Millions of dollars have been cut from the classrooms of our students. The majority of these changes happened with little to no input from teachers. Teachers are the ones in the classroom every day and have the most direct interaction with our students. Their knowledge and experience should be valued not dismissed or ignored.

Decades of academic research around the achievement gap in education has proven that results and improvement happens only when there is a system to address the non-academic barriers of our students. HB154 would allow for these wrap around services to help our students and address these barriers.

I would like to address another key component of the research and that is the recruitment and retention of quality teachers. Let me first point out that Youngstown has some of the best teachers around including a blend of experienced teachers and those that are just beginning their careers. The idea that teachers in Youngstown are inferior or substandard could not be further from the truth and is just used as a way to cast blame instead of addressing the true components of the problem. During the past several years we have seen large turnovers of teachers because we don’t create a good system for them to collaborate with peers. We also lack in creating an environment where they feel valued and supported. Teachers and students don’t want to be part of a system continuously beaten down or labeled as failing or subpar. An essential component of a strong retention and recruitment program is when veteran teachers can share experience with new teachers that have shown success. It’s also should include the ability for new teachers to share their ideas with experienced educators.

We in Youngstown have the ability to transform our district and improve the academic performance of our students but this will not occur without restoring local control.