To: The Ohio Senate Finance Committee

From: Jay Pickering President of the Lorain Education Association

Re: Written Testimony in support of the Language of HB 154 remaining in HB 166

I am the President of the Lorain Education Association and in that capacity represent nearly 500 teachers in Lorain.

The teachers would like the members of the Senate Finance committee to know that they support the majority of the Lorain Community who want control of their school district back and ask you to end what is known as HB 70.

The day HB 70, with its 66 page amendment taking away local control, was passed in one day here in Columbus the Lorain Board of Education hired a superintendent who knew he may only have 2 years before the control of the district was passed to a new ADC and a CEO would be hired. During those 2 years ALL of us in the school district: administrators teachers, all other staff, the Board of education and of course the Superintendent worked hard to address the 10 of 76 pages of HB 70 which talked about education. To that end we brought in wrap around services, addressed curriculum issues negotiated a contract all to show we could select our own CEO when HB 70 hit.

Even after receiving accolades from the then State Superintendent Ross we found out we had been had when the ADC was not able to consider our superintendent as a finalist. The fix was in. None of the finalists were known to anyone in Lorain. Ultimately the 3 appointees of, the then new State Superintendent, Paulo Demaria chose David Hardy as CEO. It now seems apparent that the only qualification Paulo felt important in a CEO was him being a future “chief for change” since Paulo was and is a current “chief for change”. Here in lies the fundamental flaw of HB 70: A CEO does not have to have any previous experience just an affiliation of an organization the state superintendent has.

If you don’t know our current CEO here is a little about him. He grew up on the streets of West Chester Pa. just outside of Philadelphia (zip code 19380). He has told us he is the proud son of a mother and father who were both teachers. In his opening statement of his testimony to you on May 16th he wrote and I quote “I humbly come to Lorain as an anomaly, my own demographics and disposition statistically more likely to represent one who has and lives in poverty on either side of the bars in a jail cell-enslaved mentally and physically by a system that has yet to be just for people like me.” I wonder what his parents think of that since people like him from West Chester have a current average home income of $85,000 and the median home price is $405,000. Since the average home income in Lorain is $35,350 and the median home price is $73,900 the CEO is an anomaly here in Lorain, but not for the reasons he claims.

We are used to his misrepresentations in Lorain and can’t do anything about it so we come to Columbus to let you know due to HB 70.

Being Lorain’s CEO is his 9th job in his 1st 15 years since college. He has never run a school district or even a large school, yet HB 70 allows him to have total control of a district with an $110,000,000 budget, almost 7000 students, and over 850 employees. He is responsible for a lot of people’s lives, education and livelihoods. He has no experience doing the job he is attempting to do and has not hired anyone with that experience.

So how has the reign of the CEO of Lorain City Schools gone?

Many if not all of the wrap around services created in those two years are gone. We had a mobile medical van visiting schools it is gone and no replacement. He has purposely changed all improvements the previous superintendent had created and failed to replace them.

We know this in Lorain, but have to come to Columbus to ask someone to address them due to HB 70.

Most of the central office administrators were fired and replaced by several chiefs during his first year. Most building administrators were also let go that year and replaced by people with little experience many of which have never been trained and are currently on temporary certificates. Last year there were 26 building administrators in Lorain, this year we have 56. That is right we have more than doubled our building administrators. One question that you may now be asking is where did the money for more administrators (over 3 million dollars) come from? Well the CEO did away with 34 federally funded title teaching positions and used those title funds to pay for the additional administrators. These teachers were providing small group tutoring for at risk students mostly in Math and English. The parents of students in Lorain whose children were receiving those services vocally opposed to this, but their voices could not be heard all the way down here in Columbus. Those students this year are not receiving these services any more.

We know this in Lorain, but have to come to Columbus to ask for title tutoring to be returned, due to HB 70.

With more administrators you would think student behavior is better right? This year it is notably worse. Fights abound at the High School and Junior Highs since, without any input or training, the CEO implemented “restorative practices”. After I spoke at an event in February a driver for our local ambulance service wanted me to know they actually are parking an ambulance closer to the High School this year since they are now called there so often. 2 fights a day was normal at the high school this year. One student even got into 3 fights in one day, since after every fight he was sent back to class rather than suspended.

We know about this in Lorain, but we have to come to Columbus to talk to someone to fix it due to HB 70.

How are the students being treated? They are being constantly belittled by the CEO in order for him to justify his existence. He has even lied to you recently in his testimony to you on May 16th regarding their performance. If you review his testimony, you will note he claims only 1% of Lorain graduates are ready for college. That is a boldfaced lie to discredit the hard work of our students. Last week 476 students graduated from Lorain High so according to the CEO only 4.76 of them are ready for college yet 21 of them also received associate degrees from college as they graduated. How could they not be college ready? Along with those 21, another 386 Lorain High school students earned college credit this year. How does he justify his numbers? Well he typically qualifies that statement with it only applies to students not taking college courses. But with his job on the line lying to you to preserve his job comes before students.

We know this in Lorain, but have to come to Columbus to defend our student’s reputations, due to HB 70.

On May15th he was to be the keynote speaker at the high school academic awards banquet, he didn’t tell anyone and he just didn’t show up. Nor did ADC chair Randall Sampson and ADC member Patty Obrien, both of which had responded they would be there. The BOE and 2 ADC members did attend. The CEO later failed to show up at the senior awards presentation despite indicating he would.

We in Lorain know all of this, but due to HB 70 we need to come to Columbus to let those who can help our students know due to HB 70.

Pre-k through 8th grade parents, students and teachers do not understand the new standards based grading system. This is a system that uses numbers instead of letter grades. Some grades use numbers 1 to 3 and others use 1 to 5. Teachers received little or no training on implementing this system and on September 9, 2018 school administrators instructed over 350 teachers to erase 4 weeks of over 4000 students grades from the districts online grading system since the system was not ready for the new grading system. What has ensued has been confusion with grades all year. Could you imagine not understanding what your child’s grades are for a whole year?

We know this in Lorain but due to HB 70 we have to come to Columbus to be heard.

He has lied about teacher attendance to malign the teachers. On January 4, 2019 he published, in his Monthly newsletter, the incorrect statistic that teachers in 2018-19 each missed an average of 18.1 days of school not counting FMLA and teacher meeting absences. This was a lie which I challenged and after 5 months he finally wrote an apology correcting his misinformation. He now admits teacher attendance is the same as many high performing districts and is not a challenge to educating the students in Lorain. He did not release his apology as he told me he would and after 3 weeks I finally released it.

By the way everyone in Lorain knew about his lie regarding teacher attendance, but no one in Columbus does so we are here today to explain thanks to HB 70.

Administrators and Teachers are treated by different standards. About a month and a half ago one of our many new untrained and temporarily certified administrators almost killed a student. Yes almost killed. The temporarily certified and obviously untrained administrator felt the best course of action to take when finding a passed out, unconscious student after school was not to call for an ambulance, but to ask another nearby student for an inhaler. This was a prescription inhaler for a different student other than the unconscious student. The inhaler was administered to the student and created a worse reaction. The administrator waited a half hour before finally calling for an ambulance. Fortunately the student survived. I have not discussed this incident because I wanted to see if the CEO would discipline the administrator. Well last Wednesday, the day after students were done, the administrator (a dean) returned to the High school boasting of her paid vacation and received no discipline.

I received a text last Wednesday morning from a teacher about the dean’s boasting and within an hour I received a frantic phone call from another teacher who had just been told she would not be re-employed next year. This teacher had no issues this year, received a skilled evaluation and had just been recommended for tenure by her principal. She has never nearly killed a student. So a skilled teacher is fired for no reason, except possibly that she is a union rep in her building and yet an untrained administrator who almost kills a student receives no discipline. WOW

Once again in Lorain many people knew about the administrator, but we have to come to Columbus to hope for a change due to HB 70.

If HB 70 continues you will need to add another $3.1 million to the budget for Lorain since the CEO has refused to meet with the school board and has caused so much discontent the public will not pass a $3.1 million renewal that is slated for 7 years. Our CEO is not the 3.1 Million Dollar man and our students need the support that levy will provide.

We in Lorain know about this, but have to come to Columbus to ask for it to be fixed due to HB-70.

Based on what I have told you many of us do not trust this CEO, but at the local level we cannot do anything about it or force him to be honest. As I speak for the teachers I can say we do not trust him and do not have confidence in him. I believe a local BOE would hold their school leader accountable anywhere else in Ohio (except Youngstown) for the good of the students.

The problem with HB 70 is the 66 pages of last minute amendments that were about creating a CEO, Dictator at the expense of their community. I implore you to end HB 70 and let us all be part of a future open, not secret discussion about the needs and supports of low income school districts. A bill like HB 70 which was created in 88 secret meetings and introduced and passed in a day is not working.

If you want to help the students of Lorain don’t dictate to us collaborate with us.

Jay Pickering LEA President