Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Diane Conibear-Xander, and I am a member of the Lorain Academic Distress Commission.

After reading the amendments to H. B. 166, I have a profound fear and certainty that these proposed amendments will land us in the same position and discord that current H.B. 70 has us in currently. I would like to share my history, and experience as an educator in Ohio for 24 years, and provide recommendations for the new Senate proposal moving forward.

Fourteen of my 24 years of service in Ohio were spent in Lorain City Schools. I was a teacher for seven years and for another seven years, I served as the Lorain Admiral King High School Principal, and led the 2010 merger between Admiral King and Southview High Schools which is now called Lorain High School. In 2011, Lorain High School received an EFFECTIVE rating on the Ohio State Report Card with a performance index of 90.5. My 3 children, one might I add as my “bonus kid" that my family has had the honor to love and care for over the last 15 years, are now ages 22, 24, and 25. They are proud and productive graduates of Lorain High School. Two of them are college graduates and one attended a tech school. My daughter graduated from Lorain High School with an Associate Degree and just completed her first year in the Doctor of Pharmacy Program at NEOMED, and she credits her academic achievement to the education and instruction she received from her teachers at Lorain High School.

As a successful school leader and teacher, who is deeply passionate about serving under-privileged children in urban public schools, I left Lorain City School District 5 years ago for a multitude of reasons, the most significant reason being unstable, inconsistent leadership. During my tenure as principal, I had 3 superintendents in 7 years, a year and half after the high school merger, in 2012, I had to move the entire school again back to the Southside in two separate buildings to manage, student bussing was cut, and over-time there was a drastic cuts in resources, programs and support, AND the state report card changed (again). I honestly felt no matter how hard I worked, or how much I cared about the students and teachers OR how hard the teachers worked and cared about their students…WE were headed in the wrong direction.

So here I am today (five years after my departure from Lorain Schools) because the Mayor of Lorain asked me to come back and serve in the Mayor’s appointee seat on the Lorain Academic Distress Commission. I was appointed on January 10th. I came into this commission ready to work, collaborate, provide leadership and support, and ultimately do what is in the best interest of students.

I am deeply troubled with the overall functionality and integrity of the Lorain Academic Distress Commission. Since my appointment to the LADC on January 10th, 2019, there was an attempt to not allow me to participate in a special meeting called because I was not sworn in, come to find out NONE of the LADC had ever been sworn in. From January to June 5th, the Commission has conducted one meeting in five months. Regardless of continuous public outcry and on-going threats to the livelihoods of upstanding school district employees, we meet minimally and at the sole discretion of the Commission Chair. At our last meeting held on June 5th, the meeting agenda was hijacked by the commission chair and the CEO, where they ONLY the CEO and Chair determined agenda topics and the allotted time the public would be able to speak, and what the public was allowed to speak about.

The new Commission Chair has a blatant disregard for efforts to collaborate and provide input on the LADC agendas and District topics of concern. The Lorain Academic Distress Commission, as a group, has had zero input on the CEO evaluation. As the Commission and I have requested on several occasions, there have been no scheduled commission working sessions or dialogue with regard to the CEO evaluation. In fact, we were notified by the Commission Chair this past Tuesday, June 12th that the CEO evaluation process was complete. Again, and unlawful act and total disregard for what the CEO contract states.

The Lorain School community has expressed urgencies and concerns about the operational conduct and leadership of the Lorain City Schools CEO. The District’s Board of Education declared a state of emergency in February. I am very concerned that district will face financial devastation if the renewal levy does not get on the ballot and spending does not get under control immediately. I have recently requested an investigation by Ohio Attorney General’s Office to conduct an investigation of the Lorain City Schools and operational oversight of the Lorain CEO, in conjunction with the State of Ohio Auditor and the Ohio Ethics Commission on the questionable ethics and OCR violations and misappropriation of public funds violations.

The continual, outright obstructions I have experienced while trying to provide input, support and transparency to advocate for the students and families of Lorain City Schools is deliberate and unjust. As an entrusted member of this appointed authority, I have had no voice and have not been able to uphold my responsibilities to perform my public duties on the Commission in a fair and equal manner.

I am alarmed after reading the Senate’s recommended amendments to H.B 166. The amendments are nothing more than a repeat of the disastrous H.B. 70. Lorain needs localized control immediately, the current dysfunctional ADC must be abolished, and Lorain Board of Education should have the ability to remove the current CEO from office expeditiously to prevent any further destruction and harm to the Lorain City School District.

Members of the Senate, if you want to help what you deem “failing schools” start with this:

* Fix (once and for all) the flawed and biased state report card and understand that our kids are much more than a standardized test score
* Restore local Board-elected control- with a state-approved strategic improvement plan that holds both the Board and Superintendent (of the Board’s choice) accountable for student growth and outcomes
* Provide adequate funding for research-based curriculum initiatives that include teacher input, high-quality teacher training and on-going implementation support
* Cap class sizes between 18-20 students at the elementary and middle school levels, and no more than 25 in high school classes
* Provide ample funding for authentic wrap-around services that include on-site healthcare- for both physical and mental health needs of students (clinic access, social workers, more counselors and nurses)
* Provide sufficient funding for early learning initiatives: support the whole child beginning at birth, increase access to preschool and transportation to school, and develop a two-tiered Kindergarten option
* Create legislation that requires local courts, children services agencies, and law officials to hold parents and guardians accountable for their children’s attendance in school- when students are chronically absent from school they will not meet the expected benchmarks of academic growth. Student attendance mandates must be created and enforced