**Senate Education Committee HB 166 – SC3117-7 Opponent Testimony Debbie Dunlap, Vice President, Reynoldsburg City Schools Board of Education June 13, 2019**

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

 First of all, thank you for the opportunity to provide some this written testimony today as you consider SC3117-7, the proposed academic distress commission reform amendment. I am a relatively green school board member (in the final year of my four-year term), but stand behind 15 years of education reporting. My reporting surrounded local districts here in Central Ohio, which gave me a solid framework upon which to build my understanding and advocacy for the Reynoldsburg City School District. I have resided in this community for more than two decades and my children are products of a quality public education here.

 Currently, I sit in a seat now advocating for *all* children in our district, and beyond.

 I write to you today to urge to reject this most current proposal which further undermines the local control of school boards and continues the course with a proven failing solution to the problem of struggling school districts. Let’s face it, takeover and transformation are one in the same. I feel the mechanism is the same regardless of the change in text. Rather, I would urge you to support HB 154 which dissolves the academic distress commissions for **Youngstown City, Lorain City** and **East Cleveland City,** repeals the laws regarding academic distress commissions and requires school districts to assemble an improvement team and create an improvement plan for low-performing school buildings.

 I respect the leadership of State Superintendent Paolo DeMaria who brought with him considerable experience to his position with Ohio three years ago. He brought with him some 30 years of experience in education and has been called a great cheerleader and an innovative leader. In 2015, DeMaria co-authored an article called "Getting Out of the Way" for the Fordham Institute, calling for a relaxation of rules and deregulation throughout schools in the state of Ohio. In recent interviews, he has very wisely championed for deregulation and more local control. And I suspect nearly every board member in the state of Ohio is with him in this belief, 100 percent.

 The report’s executive summary is very insightful. “Ohio’s policymakers have worked to fulfill the promise of a ‘thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state’ for decades, enacting laws and regulations to address virtually every conceivable aspect of public education. The system of regulations in place today is designed, unintentionally, to deliver exactly the results that our education system produces. The problem is that those results are by no means satisfactory. Ohio’s education system is not the best in the nation; it’s not even in the top ten. States that used to lag behind Ohio are now moving ahead. If we want something better for Ohio, much must change, including today’s burdensome regulatory regimen.”

 School districts and their local leaders are intently in-tune with both their community and their students. The report is built on the simple concept that, “if educational excellence is to be a top-priority for the state, policymakers must vest much greater operational authority with on-the-ground educators and leaders.” In order to effectively solve the problem of failing school districts and to support their efforts to reach high-achieving goals, the state must allow for local leaders to assess themselves and devise solutions that match their own needs. Funding, not oversight, is key to helping build strong school systems in Ohio. Local educational leaders, in tandem with school boards, local business partners, and the students themselves, have the capability to rise to the occasion – not a CEO – when given the proper *support* from the top down, not red tape and well-intentioned, yet uninformed and burdensome, oversight.

 Truly working with local leaders and educators – collaborating with our boots on the ground – will prove to be a much more effective solution than any takeover or transformation. Our children are not widgets but human beings who are unique in their needs which vary from school to school, and district to district. I urge you to support HB 154, and if needed, continue deliberations on a longer-term solution that maintains local control while working toward a greater tomorrow for ALL our children.

Sincerely,

Debbie Dunlap

Vice-president

Board of Education

Reynoldsburg City Schools

7244 E. Main Street

Reynoldsburg, Ohio 43068

(614) 864-3702 (h)