June 12. 2019

Ohio Senate Education Committee

RE: AM. Sub HB 166

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Terhar, Ranking Minority Member Fedor, and committee members,

My name is Jessica Bosak. I am mother to two elementary aged children in the Hilliard City School district. I am also a former PTO president, Inter School PTO representative and former hotel general manager of twelve years responsible for maintaining a $13 million operating budget. I am currently a member of HCSD parent advisory board, Diversity Committee Chair for Hilliard Crossing Elementary School and serve as an appointed Columbus City Council area commissioner for the Far West Side. I tell you all this to illustrate my deep commitment to my community and the district which serves my children. Neither as a former business leader, PTO volunteer, nor appointed government official could I ever claim to fully understand the complex needs of our schools, children, or communities but I could just as easily brand myself as an education consultant and claim to be. I do however understand the importance of my voice as a voter.

Through HB70 and now through the proposed amendment to HB166, my voice would be silenced should I happen to reside in a district deemed as failing under a wholly inadequate system of measures. Voters do not always make the best most informed choices. Sometimes we elect individuals who are self-serving or who push an agenda inconsistent with their constituency or who simply are poorly suited for the job they are tasked with completing. That being said, every 2-4 years, we have the opportunity to amend our mistakes. Under HB166, as in HB70, that right is completely striped. Regardless of best intentions, we are not children to be grounded until we learn to make better choices. Removing local control from districts under HB70 and placing that responsibility in the hands of a CEO or ADC has not yielded favorable results. It fractures the community and it is beyond my comprehension why a similar scenario with fluffier language is being proposed. Whether it’s a CEO, Academic Distress Commission, School Improvement Commission, or School Transformation Director, the result is the same. My voice would no longer matter.

As I mentioned, I live within the HCSD. My district is locally well funded. It is the 8th largest district in the state and 75% of our teachers hold a Masters degree. The housing market is crazy in my district because families with means want to be in this school district. Our Superintendant, Dr John Marschhausen, serves at Superintendant in Residence at The Ohio State University College of Education and Human Ecology. He was also just appointed to Governor DeWine’s Executive Workforce Board.

And our district scored an overall grade of “C” on the state report card.

Achievement: D Graduation Rate: A

Progress: D Improving at risk k-3 readers: C

Gap Closing: B Prepared for success: D

Looking strictly at the state report card one would wonder why our district is so coveted or why our superintendant’s input is so sought after? I can tell you. Our district has a healthy tax base to fund our schools. We have excellent teachers, as do all district throughout the state. We have innovative learning opportunities provided to our children and where appropriate engage business leaders to identify areas of opportunity. We have a plan to continuously improve the educational environment. We have stable leadership invested in and committed to our community.

Language in HB166 amendment is insulting to me as a parent, I can’t imagine how that is received by administrators, professional educators and democratically elected school board members in districts where “failure” has been prescribed. Assuming a school district does not continuously review, amend, and implement measures to improve student performance is insulting at best. Failures of this and previous General Assemblies to provide districts with adequate funding to {see below excerpt as contained within this amendment as vested to the “director”} is a travesty.

 “ (a) Address the physical and mental well-being of students and their families; 792 793

(b) Provide mentoring; 794

(c) Provide job resources; 795

(d) Disseminate higher education information; 796

(e) Offer recreational or cultural activities; 797

(f) Provide any other services that will contribute to a successful learning environment. 798 799”

Just two weeks ago, this body listened for eight hours as community members from East Cleveland, Youngstown, and other districts testified actions taken prior to state takeover yielding promising positive changes and the fractures widened under a CEO or ADC. Give districts the ability to fund and implement measures such as those outlined in lines 792-799 of this amendment. Rightfully those resources should be addressed in order to help our children and communities but not in a situation where local control is striped, “consultants” are experts, and uncertainty abound. Children need a stable environment in which to learn and grow. Many of the children in those districts being targeted so to speak for improvement lack stability in many areas of their lives outside school. The tension and instability created by another HB70-like plan will only degrade their environments further.

I ask you not seek to shine up a plan we know is broken but to eliminate it entirely. HB70 redressed as HB166 is simply a continuation of punitive policy based on poor markers of success. Our kids deserve better.

Thank you for your time.

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