Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the proposed language titled SC3117X7 that reflects Academic Distress Commission related policy for potential inclusion in Am. Sub. House Bill (HB) 166. I am Dr. Romules Durant, Superintendent and CEO of Toledo Public Schools.

As Superintendent of Toledo Public Schools, I am responsible for the academic achievement of our District. I have put in place programs and initiatives to improve the academic environment and learning conditions for all students. As a dedicated group of educators, we have achieved the following growth in the past 4 years:

* graduation rate improvement of 15% from 64% to 79% for all students, 20% growth for African-American students, 18% growth for economically disadvantaged students and 16% growth for students with disabilities
* Preliminary results show that nearly 50% of the students in grades K – 3 who were off-track are moving to on-track from the previous year as measured by NWEA MAP.
* English Learners growth targets have increased from 42% to 63% scoring proficient or making demonstrated growth as measured by the OELPA tests for the 2018 -2019 school year. These at-risk students will continue to improve English acquisition and move towards proficiency.
* Toledo Public Schools has increased the number of students reaching the Third Grade Guarantee Promotional Score from 71.9% to 85% since 2015. This progress has provided thousands of students to move successfully to the next grade level yet does not factor into a District’s grade card formula, as it carries no point total to determine the K-3 Literacy component and Overall Grade Card of a District or School.

Though significant growth is occurring, we have been labeled an F rated District and under the potential state takeover of the Academic Distress Commission (ADC).

As we strategically plan our work to ensure ALL students are college and career ready graduates we pay close attention to other districts and the academic progress that is occurring. We have witnessed the lack of progress that has happened in Youngtown and Lorain due to the loss of local control. We have closely watched the demise of Detroit Public Schools and witnessed the negative impact on students, parents, businesses and the community as the local control has been lost to state takeover.

As Superintendent and CEO of Toledo Public Schools, I work closely with our students, parents, business and stakeholders to provide a school district that will increase property values and make Toledo a choice for parents and industry. Working together, we have achieved the following:

* Creation of Business Advisory Committee
* Successful passage of 2 levies with nearly 70% approval
* Increase in enrollment of 1,700 students in the past three years
* Alignment with Career Tech programs and Toledo Chamber of Commerce.
* Strong partnerships with Lucas County Metropolitan Housing Authority

Though many of our partners could not be here to verbally testify, you will see their desire to abolish the Academic Distress Commission in the form of written testimony including:

* Honorable Mayor of City of Toledo
* Toledo City Council
* Toledo Chamber of Commerce
* Toledo Community Foundation
* Promedica Health Systems
* PNC Bank
* Plus many more

TPS agrees with the existing language that now exists with HB 166 with regard to ADC to abolish the ADC concept and return local control to communities who will are then required to control their own turnaround strategy. TPS does indeed believe the existing language can be enhanced to ensure accountability of that local process, but the proposed language that is the focus of this hearing (SC3117X7) falls short of that goal. Any additional language that is considered should do the following:

* The State establishing a framework for reform, but local communities, not the State, should develop a specific plan for improvement;
* A plan for improvement should outline a targeted intervention that is evidence based and has been proven to work locally or in similar districts; and a consistent set of academic expectations that is specific to the local school district and its related strengths and challenges, building only upon what works;
* A final plan must include the agreement of the Superintendent, School Board President and the Union President for the district;
* Local control over the process should be retained including authority of the local school board, Superintendent, teachers; existing collective bargaining agreements; and existing dispute resolution agreements and policies;
* Any external support (beyond ODE) in the form of technical assistance should be delivered by teachers or administrators with at least a decade worth of experience in successful intervention strategies in an urban or mid-size urban education setting; and some portion of that time in Ohio.

In closing, I want to reiterate that Toledo and other communities are already working together with their stakeholders to improve academic performance and develop accountability measures to provide a strong school system that will develop college and career ready graduates and create a community that attracts business and industry. Let us continue this work by reinforcing local control, partnerships with labor, and developing plans that ensure accountability. Thank you for allowing me to speak today and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Dr. Romules Durant