My name is Martha McFerran Dahya.

I am a high school teacher in Columbus.  This is my 31st year.  I’ve seen a lot.

1.      Over 20 years ago in 1997, The Ohio Supreme Court found Ohio’s system of educational funding to be unconstitutional.

2.      Urban districts, where I work, teach immigrants, students dealing with generational poverty and kids with special needs.  We don’t have funds to equalize opportunities without state help.  Which has not come.

3.      Testing is out of balance.  Two-part tests in seven high school subject areas with no fixed cut score require guess work by counselors, students and families for which tests to retake and study.  In January of 2019, “work-arounds” to get graduation rates up were announced by ODE to students who would graduate four months later in May of 2019.  So much for adequate notice.

4.      The results of unbalanced testing are used to “grade” schools.  Of course, urban schools with fewer resources score lower.

5.      The Legislature and the Ohio Department of Education have added to an already full teaching day the following: Teacher Based Team meetings, data collection, data entry, test preparation, multiple tests, Ohio Teacher Evaluation meetings as well as Student Learning Objectives.  Please remember, the work-load of teachers is already heavy.

6.      So, the state, which inadequately funds schools, sets up a high-stake testing situation which grades schools as failing, then uses this to justify taking state control over local schools with the remedy being hiring for-profit outfits to come in and take over.

7.      Teachers already know what is needed.  The Supreme Court ruled what was needed.  We need adequate funding.  We need more teachers.  We need more time with students.  Not more high-paid experts.  We need help on the ground.  We need more teachers doing the hard, loving, creative, joyful work of helping students learn.

8.      I have seen the pressure that accompanies a threat of state takeover.  Nervous top administrators hire retired administrators to push current administrators to improve numbers.  That is not the long-term work of helping younger kids love reading.  That’s not inspiring middle schoolers to try the scientific process and it does not lead to critical thinking by history students.  It leads to more preparation for high stakes testing.  Improvement takes place at the building level with good principals working collaboratively with good teachers.

9.      Please abandon the notion that takeover in any form is productive.  Use the money to hire more teachers, tutors and support staff.

10.   The Ohio General Assembly and the Ohio Department of Education have been complicit in massive policy failure: inadequate funding, over-testing, additional non-teaching duties and secret takeover legislation.

11.   Do not take local control away.  Repeal House Bill 70 and keep House Bill 154 language alive.