



Senate Education Committee  
Testimony on SB 319  
Interested Party Testimony  
June 9, 2020  
Presented by Melissa Cropper, President  
Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Education Committee, I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT) and Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio AFL-CIO. OFT represents teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, and other support staff in our K-12 schools as well as faculty and support staff in our higher ed institutes and public employees at Franklin County Children's Services.

OFT is not opposed to the majority of SB 319. Our primary concern is with the furlough provision in the bill. OFT opposes the furloughing provisions for the following reasons:

1. Districts can already furlough employees. They simply have to collectively bargain over it. If the district believes that furloughing is better than other alternatives, then they should be able to work with union members to agree to furloughing provisions. In 2011, 62% of Ohioans said workers should have the right to negotiate their working conditions. We understand that flexibility will be needed in the fall, and our members are already engaged in conversations in their schools districts about this.

2. We cannot continue to do more with less. Nobody knows what the next school year is going to bring, but we know it will not be a normal school year. We have been working with our members to imagine the different conditions that might be in place, and every possible scenario requires more staff in our school system, not less. In whatever way that our students will be returning to school, we anticipate that their needs will be higher, both academically due to the abnormal year this past year, and emotionally due to the stress of the COVID-19 shutdown as well as the impact of the fallout from the murder of George Floyd. Additionally, schools will need more support staff to keep school buildings clean and more teachers to allow for smaller classes if we return to physical spaces, more staff to support distance learning if we do not return, or both if we have a blended learning environment. To say that districts can furlough people who may not be needed during uncertain times indicates a lack of creative thinking about how every adult can be used in some capacity to meet the growing needs of our students.

3. As an alternative to layoffs, Ohio has the Workshare program that allows employers to reduce staff hours and have the state unemployment program cover the reduced hours. This is another option that could be collectively bargained at a local level if the intent is to allow employees to keep benefits while not working.

4. Saying that teachers and support staff can be furloughed because they are not needed indicates that some classes and services are not as important as others. It is hard to imagine that any teachers or support staff would not be needed next year. We might need flexibility in how we use teachers and staff differently, but allowing furloughing for “not being needed” indicates that you can cut an art teacher, music teacher, paraprofessional, etc., without a detrimental effect to our students. These people can all serve critical roles in remote or hybrid situations. In addition, those classes are the ones that actually keep students engaged.

While the other provisions of the bill make sense, furloughing does not. Collective bargaining of furloughs, including provisions on how the furloughs would be implemented, is the best option for local decision-making.

In closing, I want to add that we must stop looking at how we make cuts to education and instead present a united front on pressing the federal government for resources for our state. The HEROES Act would bring \$2.1 billion in relief to Ohio for K-12 education alone. This is critical because our districts are already operating on a foundation formula that has been frozen. We cannot continue to do more with less and still expect to meet the needs of all our students. COVID-19 highlighted which students are already the most impacted by lack of funding. The students who are the furthest behind will be the ones who need that federal money the most. We need you, serving in this capacity at a state level, to reach out to your colleagues in the U.S. Senate and urge them to pass the HEROES Act. Our children’s future should not be a partisan issue. We cannot forfeit the futures of our children by denying them the resources they need to be successful.

This concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions you may have.