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Senate Education Committee  
Opponent Testimony SB 320  
Presented by Melissa Cropper, President  
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Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to SB 320. I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers. OFT represents teachers and support staff in the K-12 system, faculty and support staff in the higher ed system and public employees at Franklin County Children's Services.

OFT has greatly appreciated the leadership of Gov. Mike DeWine and former Director of Health Amy Acton throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Though the closing down of school buildings was not convenient, and, in fact, created a lot more work for teachers and all others involved, our members, as educators, appreciated that the reason for doing so was based upon the best science and facts available at the time and in the interest of public health.

Unfortunately, when the shutdown process was in the beginning weeks, several administrators still chose to have all employees work from the school building without offering any kind of personal protective equipment to safeguard their health - even when the Governor was urging that if you can work from home, you should work from home. It literally took a direct order from the Governor before some employees were released to educate children from their homes.

OFT opposes SB 320 because it would take away the ability of the Governor and the Director of Health to use the best information available to determine whether it is safe to have school buildings open or to set parameters for safeguarding the health of employees and students. In fact, a recent Fox poll shows that almost seven out of ten people trust the decision made by health professionals and Governors. The numbers are higher for Dr. Acton and Governor DeWine.

We fully understand the complexities, as well as the expense, involved with trying to educate students in a non-traditional setting. We are highly concerned that in the absence of state guidelines, decisions might be made based upon financial reasons or ease at the risk of jeopardizing employees, students, and families.

I am sure that all of you have received calls from people with varying opinions on this topic. I have too. The most memorable ones though are from the people who truly fear for their health - the teacher in Port Clinton who, prior to the shutdown, was scared to death that she was going to take something home to her husband who had a suppressed immune system, or more recently, the teacher who I taught with in Georgetown who has diagnosed respiratory issues

and is terrified that she will die if she comes into contact with this disease and that it will be a miserable death. What happens if these teachers work for a superintendent who decides that he doesn't believe that COVID-19 is a risk in that community and doesn't require masks or make plans for safe social distancing or have a plan to shut down the school if confirmed cases appear?

While we believe that the majority of the decision-making for how schools operate should be determined at a local level through community engagement, collaboration, and collective bargaining, SB 320 is a step too far in taking away the power of the Governor and Director of Health to make critical decisions that impact the health and safety of everyone in this state. We urge you to vote no on this bill.

Thank you. I would be glad to answer any questions.