



**The Alliance for High Quality Education
Proponent Testimony – Senate Bill 358
Senate Education Committee
September 2, 2020**

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to offer proponent testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 358. SB 358 provides the extension of much need flexibility to assist school districts in responding to the continuing challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic presents to schools, educators and students this school year. Thanks to the bill Joint Sponsors for bringing this timely bi-partisan legislation to the Senate for consideration.

My name is Anthony Podojil, Ph.D., and I am the Executive Director of The Alliance for High Quality Education (AHQE*). Prior to joining the Alliance as its executive director, I served as superintendent for the West Geauga Local Schools for thirteen years. I earned my doctorate at Cleveland State University in the area of Urban Educational Administration.

The Alliance offers support for SB 358 and the emergency clause contained in the bill. Today, I would like to address a few provisions where we think clarity is warranted. I would also like to request that an amendment be added to this bill to extend the Open Meetings Act flexibility from HB 197 for boards of education. The HB 197 flexibility for virtual board meetings is set to expire on December 1. The Alliance thinks it is necessary for school boards to have permissive authority to continue to meet remotely through the remainder of the 2020-21 school year. We will work with the Joint Sponsors and Committee Members regarding this amendment request in the upcoming days and weeks.

Regarding the bill provisions that require a bit of clarity, I would like to focus on educator evaluations, the federal testing waiver, and restoring the State Superintendent's waiver authority. Regarding teacher evaluations, we just want to publicly confirm that Section 10 of HB 164 is not amended by this bill. We simply want to make sure that the use of the performance-based components of the teacher evaluation system can continued to be used as the primary component of that process during the 2020-21 school year.

The Alliance also supports the federal testing waiver provisions of SB 358 As Introduced. We believe there will be continued COVID-19 disruptions throughout the course of this school year which will adversely impact the availability of reliable value-added and student growth measure data. We also have concerns regarding the administration of state assessments for students attending school virtually or via a hybrid model. The issue of how to address test

administration for students attending school remotely is impacting the administrations of state assessments right now; students are impacted as the school year is starting regarding the in-person administration of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) and we have concerns regarding the fall administration of the Third Grade ELA assessment. We encourage the Joint Sponsors, the Committee, and the Senate to try to also address these fall administration testing issues now in SB 358.

The Alliance also supports SB 358's extension of the HB 197 provisions re-instating certain waiver authority for the Superintendent of Public Instruction. I do, however, suggest amending the bill language on page 16, line 447 to add back in the words "include, but are not limited to, deadlines" in order to not limit the State Superintendent's ability to address unknown COVID-related issues that are likely to pop up throughout the course of the school year.

Finally, I would be remiss to not address the EdChoice provisions in the bill. The Alliance feels strongly there should be a long-term solution regarding the future of the performance-based voucher program. Ideally, a long-term solution together with report card reform would be finalized in time to make informed, data-driven decisions regarding the EdChoice eligibility list for the 2021-2022 school year. To the extent that the legislature is committed to continuing to work on a long-term resolution to EdChoice over the next several months, we understand why the Joint Sponsors recommend an extension of the HB 197 solution in the interim due to the upcoming February 1 deadline.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today. SB 358 provides time-sensitive tools that school districts undoubtedly need this school year. I am happy to answer any question you have at this time.

*The Alliance for High Quality Education is a consortium of 73 high-performing school districts located throughout the State of Ohio including the Toledo, Cleveland, Akron-Canton, Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati areas. The Alliance for the last twenty-five years has represented its members' interests on matters of state education policy and funding, as well as contributing to fostering high quality educational opportunities for students in their districts and those across the state.