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Sponsor Testimony – Senate Bill 358
Senate Education Committee
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Chair Lehner and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 358.

If you recall, during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, this body passed House Bill 197. The bill contained an omnibus amendment that, among other important provisions, provided for several exemptions and waivers to ease the burden on Ohio's schools. Then, House Bill 164 passed in June, expanding upon many of the provisions put into place by House Bill 197.

We have been hearing from teachers, educators, support staff, school board members, and parents that the coming school year will be uncertain and inconsistent in many ways. Some school districts are planning face to face instruction, some remote, and some are taking a hybrid approach. We must take every action to ensure that those who choose to return to school are as safe as possible, and that those who don't are still able to learn and teach. As Ohioans continue to experience consequences of this pandemic, the education community will require the same flexibility that was granted in the spring. This bill will extend all of the educational moratoriums included in House Bills 197 and 164 through the 2020-2021 school year.

Senate Bill 358 will accomplish the following key items among others:

- Require the Ohio Department of Education to request a waiver for federally required state tests
- Continue the "freeze" on report cards and related sanctions, including new state takeovers, and EdChoice district designations.
- Extend flexibility for educator and administrator evaluations, student promotions, and graduation requirements through the 2020-2021 school year.

Without the extension of these provisions, the uncertain learning conditions in the 2020-2021 school year will be even more stressful for teachers, students and families. Missing school has produced serious gaps in student learning. Coupled with the normal summer losses, teachers will need to focus on getting students back on track. Any pressure we can relieve so that the focus is on teaching and learning, rather than testing and evaluating, will help our students succeed in the long term.

Schools need to know what adjustments will be made to any requirements, in order to have as much time as possible to achieve what needs to be accomplished. Proactively passing this legislation will enable schools to focus on what is most important in the fall, the safety and education of our children.

At this time, we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.