

SB 248 Testimony – May 12, 2020 – Amy Kissinger

Chairman Schuring, and members of the Ohio Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee, thank you for your attention today, as I share with you regarding my support of Senate Bill 248. I am Amy Kissinger, an elected member of the Cambridge City School District Board of Education. I serve on the Southeast Region Executive Committee of the Ohio School Boards Association and I am a member of the Board of Trustees of the Ohio School Boards Association. I am the Business Director for the Morgan County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Most importantly, I am the mom of two boys. One who recently graduated from our public school, and one who is in 3rd grade.

As a lifelong resident of South East Ohio, I tend to see all educational issues through a lens heavily influenced by the DeRolph school funding lawsuit.

I remember the time well, when the DeRolph case was being litigated. We talked about kindergarten students in districts so poor, and with such inadequate facilities, that these young kindergarten children had to put on their coats to walk to another building to use the restroom in the winter. At the same time, you could travel a couple hours and be in a district with new facilities, state of the art curriculum and classrooms, low teacher to student ratios, and extracurricular opportunities for days... and of course, modern plumbing in every building.

After the March 1997 Ohio Supreme Court ruling which found Ohio's school funding system unconstitutional, the general assembly created the Ohio School Facilities Commission to provide all

districts with the opportunity for quality facilities. Since 2012, we call this agency the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission.

Now here we are in 2020, 23 years after the creation of the Commission. And while I give credit where credit is due and I appreciate the advancements in our facilities as administered by the Commission, I kindly suggest that we have taken things a bit too far.

The Commission noted in its report to the 133rd Ohio General Assembly in December 2019, “From the school district official perspective, participants noted that school districts plan for and address a multitude of health and safety issues daily. Among the issues facing school administrators are active shooter situations, fire, bomb threats, bullying and cyberbullying, physical health outbreaks, and mental health issues. Each of these health and safety issues requires the allocation of resources – money, people, planning time –to reduce risk and provide the best, safest educational environment for students and staff.

So let’s talk about health and safety issues for a minute.

As I testified in February on a different issue, it would seem that this current legislature understands that this is a perilous time for our state’s youngest and most vulnerable citizens, as evidenced by our most recent biennium budget and its increased attention on and funding for addressing those needs of our children, not the least of which are significant mental health and social emotional needs. Thank you for that funding. But, the State gives, and the State takes away.

Our district is losing \$342,000 as a result of the first state funding cut. It's a tough pill to swallow, but I understand tough financial decisions. Over the past couple years, our community told us no three separate times at the ballot. In an act of financial desperation, our Board then decided to move our inside millage to generate revenue to provide necessary and basic maintenance to our 16 year old buildings, which resulted in an increase in local property tax. As one Board member of five, I made that decision, knowing that it might jeopardize my future bid for re-election. It was a difficult decision, but it was the right decision for kids. I potentially ended my career as an elected official in order to ensure that our district could pay for immediate needs like heating and cooling and roofs. In light of our struggle to provide for basic needs, a storm shelter requirement is costly, overly burdensome and unreasonable as it relates to the risks it is meant to mitigate. If we, as a state, have the funds for such a thing – and I would argue that we presently do not – then allow me to suggest that Ohio's investment in educating students and student safety would be better made elsewhere. Because as we all know, raising new funds locally is, by and large, a thing of the past.

I have been a public employee for nearly my entire adult life. I have also served in an elected capacity. I know an administrative bureaucratic maneuver when I see one. And I suspect that you do, too. You and your predecessors have never officially required districts to adhere to this overreaching requirement. In fact, you have twice before protected our public schools from this unfunded mandate. It is my request and my hope that you will do so again.