

Thank you Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and House Finance Committee members for giving me the opportunity today to provide interested party testimony today on House Bill 110.

My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The Fordham Institute is an education-focused nonprofit that conducts research, analysis, and policy advocacy with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C. Our Dayton office, through the affiliated Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, is also a charter school sponsor.

HB 110, at least as it pertains to education, is a bit unusual for a budget bill in that it isn't filled with hundreds of policy changes. We salute Governor DeWine for taking this step and urge you to follow his lead.

Nevertheless, HB 110 still makes a number of significant changes. In the interest of brevity, I'll offer praise or raise concerns on a few issues without going into too much detail.

School funding formula

Governor DeWine did not propose a new school funding formula in HB 110. Instead, he proposed continued funding at FY19 levels for another two years. Given the work that this chamber and your colleagues in the Senate have done on school funding, the governor's deference makes sense. I'm optimistic and hopeful that you'll reach a positive result on school funding before June 30 as schools need to be funded based on the students they're serving and not through the current hodgepodge of caps and guarantees. We'd urge you to incorporate HB 1 into this bill before passage. To be clear, while we support many of the principles encompassed in HB 1, we think that it can still be improved. My testimony to Chair Richardson's subcommittee last week reflects what we believe to be the bill's strengths and weaknesses. I won't repeat that for this committee but would be happy to expound further if there are questions.

Quality community school support fund

Governor DeWine's budget increased spending for this important initiative from \$30-million-per-year this biennium to \$54 million per year in FY 22 and FY 23. We urge to retain this important program that provides up to an additional \$1,750 per economically disadvantaged student to charters that qualify based on academic performance. These dollars help narrow funding gaps, provide extra resources that enable charters to serve more students, and make Ohio a more attractive locale for excellent national charter networks. We also encourage you to shift this from a line-item appropriation and include it in permanent law with direct funding from the state.

Transportation for charter and private school students

HB 110 makes a host of changes regarding district transportation of charter and private school students. We support the governor's recommendations. Everyone knows that transporting students across a city isn't easy, but over the last couple of years a number of districts (even pre-pandemic) started breaking from their long-recognized responsibility to transport choice students. HB 110 would directly address many of the most troubling issues including placing limits on the use of mass transit for our youngest students, requiring the development of transportation plans each year, providing additional time for choice schools to opt to provide their own transportation, and putting teeth in the law when a district—however rarely—acts in bad faith.

Graduation requirements

After many years of debate, the legislature passed new less test-focused graduation requirements last year. The requirements were the result of a coming together of a variety of groups and represented a smart compromise. HB 110 makes a number of clarifying changes to the graduation requirements and most are okay. However, the changes around graduation seals would be a huge setback.

As a quick refresher, to earn a diploma, students now need to do three things: complete state required courses, show competency in math and English, and earn two seals from 12 options that show mastery or deeper engagement in a specific area. The bill modifies the citizenship and science seals to give them to any student who simply passes a class in the subject area with a B or better. Currently, a student needs to pass an EOC, AP, or IB exam (or pass a College Credit Plus course) to demonstrate a deeper learning of government or science. By awarding a seal for passing required classes, HB 110 would eviscerate any potential benefit seals were supposed to have. It would be preferable to simply eliminate the seals requirement and the accompanying bureaucracy altogether than to make them meaningless.

FAFSA as a graduation requirement

HB 110 makes a variety of changes to encourage and facilitate higher FAFSA completion rates. These are well-intentioned, and we support the underlying efforts. Many high school students incorrectly believe that education post high school is beyond their financial reach. This is often not the case, and if federal discussions around increasing the size of the Pell Grant come to fruition—it could be even less true. The biggest nudge to increase FAFSA completion is making it a graduation requirement. Judging by the experience in other states, this can dramatically increase completion rates. HB 110 contains some exemptions if parents refuse or are unavailable to complete the forms. These are important, so we'd urge to keep these in the bill for families who—despite the nudge being provided by the state—choose to keep their finances private. The goal, after all, is for the FAFSA requirement to open doors to higher education and not be a barrier to high school graduation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 110. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.