

N. J. Akbar, Ph.D.
President
Akron City Board of Education

H.B. 334 | Regards School District Board Member Compensation, Training

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. I thank you, Rep. Ingram for the invitation and opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 334. I am Dr. N. J. Akbar, and I humbly serve as President of the Akron City Board of Education.

School Board members come from all walks of life and are some of the most locally connected elected members of our community. Members on school boards range from single mothers, community members who work part-time or currently unemployed to those who work full-time from entry level to executive level roles. There are also school board members who are retired. The service that school board members provide is paramount to the elevation of our community.

In normal years outside of the pandemic, it is normal for school board members to reach the \$5,000 cap by September or October. In 2020 during initial uncertainty of the pandemic, our board had its normal 22 regularly scheduled meetings. However, in addition to this, we had 13 Special meetings, 36 committee meetings, 3 Board retreats, which all total 74 qualifying meetings and more than 190 hours for the year. This means members could have spent more than 15 hours in qualifying meetings per month. It is much more when the non-qualifying meetings and service are incorporated. A conservative estimate of 20-25 hours per week from March to September 2020 for all the virtual meetings, assisting with the lunch program or anything else to boost community morale and confidence in the schools, fielding phone calls and all the reading and studying that board members must do to serve well. Afterwards, this would mean at least 10 additional hours per week. All of this is on top of a members employment responsibilities or other duties they are responsible to perform to provide for themselves and their families.

Although, most members have never complained, the compensation increase and restriction removal for school boards like the one I serve on will allow members, especially those who already make little to no income, gas money and support to attend board meetings, sports and school events, community meetings, visits to schools and trainings. Whether I agree with any board's decisions, the weight, responsibility and sacrifice that board members make to serve across this state and in every district is immeasurable. We do it for the love of children and community. No one joins a school board to get rich. It comes with a lot of hours with little to no increased popularity or status. Most members do it solely for service and passion for education. If you boil it down, in 2020, if this law was in effect, Board members in my district would have been compensated about \$12,000 for their service but in a more normal year, their compensation would likely be more around \$8,000.

The compensation increase for the service on our school board may not appear to be a lot, which in the grand scheme, it is not. But the difference that it will make for the members who are retired, unemployed, work part-time and overall, who give hours upon hours of service per week to their community, it is a small gesture of appreciation. People who join school boards, do not do it to get rich or even have great community influence. They do it for the love of our children and community. We take time away from our families and other responsibilities to serve...to serve to make our schools a stronger and better place. Schools are our pathway to the future world that we want to live in, and our school boards help provide that vision. I urge your committee to pass this bill, rally your caucus to pass it in the House chamber and move it into law. Support this bill – not for me, but for the single mother who serves on a board, for the retiree, for your neighbor - all in service of our children and because it is the right thing to do. Thank you for your consideration of this bill. Many board members will appreciate the token of gratitude for their service, which this bill represents.