



**Representative Paula Hicks-Hudson
House District 44**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and fellow members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 374.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light vulnerabilities and gaps in our local communities throughout Ohio to provide all the essential supports to invest in our children. This piece of legislation aims to help create a system of local and state policies and practices that provide all children and families with the following:

1. **CARE** – through access to mental and physical health services from birth, nutritional food, and healthy community spaces
2. **STABILITY** – through consistent expectations and practices that reinforce a culture of inclusion and healing among students and adults
3. **COMMITMENT** – through economically and civically empowered communities that democratize access to healthy living and learning environments
4. **CAPACITY** – through well-resourced learning climates that meet the physical, emotional and academic needs of students

Each day school systems serve thousands of students in neighborhoods where communities are failing to provide basic needs to their students, such as healthy food, affordable housing, safety, etc. Despite these challenges, school systems have miraculously graduated many students who have grown to become productive citizens. Yet, we still lose too many of our students and have to face the reality that we collectively must do better for our children who are our future. Doing better requires communities to provide a healthy living and learning environment to support the tireless work of students, parents, educators, grassroots advocates, and other stakeholders in our education system.

The outlined framework draws from the wisdom of communities, strong research, and data to identify 24 indicators that represent supports associated with academic and economic success. These indicators reflect key city policies and practices needed to provide care, stability, commitment, and capacity, and ultimately provide all students with healthy living and learning environments where they can learn and thrive. I believe that as elected officials we should prioritize these measures, to enable all communities to understand their role in creating vibrant environments and identify areas of growth for student success to accelerate the educational outcomes for Ohio's children.

The Loving State index is in ten cities across the US, Ohio will become the first state to adopt the index on behalf of our local communities in order build a foundation where a comprehensive system of support is available for all Ohio children to have an equitable opportunity to achieve.



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This legislation serves as a logical step in examining areas where cities have been successful in creating systems that deliver supports, call attention to areas where large gaps in access and equity persist and create new policies and practices that are needed to improve outcomes. .

Lastly, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsored testimony on HB 374 and I am prepared to answer any questions that you may have.