



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



AS THE VOICE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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**Senate Bill 178: Opposition Testimony**  
**House Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**Tuesday, December 13, 2022**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jeff Wensing. I am a high school math teacher from Parma and currently serve as the Vice President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of the 120,000 members of OEA, thank you for the opportunity to offer opposition testimony on Senate Bill 178.

OEA has serious concerns about the substance of this proposal. Further, the speed of the bill rushing through lame duck is disappointing and disturbing. SB 178 proposes a significant shift in how education is overseen and supported in Ohio. This type of change should not be enacted during the session’s waning days. Stakeholder input is needed.

Education, by its very nature, is collaborative. Educating a student takes collaboration between the teachers in the building, administration, education support professionals, and families. On another level, we are not one statewide education system, but hundreds of school districts, vocational schools, ESCs, charter schools, and private schools. In the spirit of that collaboration, changes that impact education should be well vetted and well understood. What will change, and what will stay the same? The concerns of stakeholders should be heard and addressed to avoid unintended consequences.

That is not what happened in the Senate. Among those who testified, opposition testimony against the bill outnumbered proponents. OEA and other significant groups within the education community raised serious concerns as interested parties. Despite this, SB 178 moved at lightning speed. The only change following the adoption of the 2,100-page substitute bill was an amendment to make the effective date earlier. The fact that this second hearing is for all testimony and a possible vote promises more of the same.

It is worth taking a hard look at how the State Board of Education and the Ohio Department of Education function and what can be improved. It is also important to note some positives about the current system. Whether elected or appointed, members of the State Board of Education give of themselves to serve Ohio’s students. The meetings and deliberations of the State Board of Education are public. The public has the opportunity to provide input on rule making and other decisions.

The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

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The Department of Education meets regularly with stakeholder groups and seeks input on issues such as professional development, ESSA applications, strategic planning, and more.

There is a lot of experience and institutional knowledge within ODE. Would that talent transfer to the newly created Department of Education and Workforce? Would the organizational chart change at the top or throughout? What will be emphasized more? What will be emphasized less? In short, what is the plan? I find it troubling that this bill would get serious consideration during lame duck without answers to those questions. If there are answers to those questions and they are not being shared with key stakeholder groups, I'd find that equally troubling.

Speaking on behalf of OEA members across the state, the bottom line is that we want what is best for students. Our students, educators, and schools face daunting challenges. We know that our school districts need support. We need equitable funding; strategies to attract and retain quality educators; resources to address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Regardless of the powers and duties of the State Board of Education, how the Department of Education is organized, or whatever name it goes by, we want to have a seat at the table. We want educators and other stakeholders to have input and a meaningful voice in decision making. That is how we'll get the best results for the students we serve.

In closing, OEA opposes passing this bill in lame duck. Instead, I would urge for a process that allows adequate time for stakeholder input and buy in. OEA stands ready to participate in any discussion about how we can improve education for Ohio's students.

Chair Manning, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer questions from the committee.

