



December 13, 2022
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
SB 178 Opponent Testimony
Presented by Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and Committee members, I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT) and Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio AFL-CIO. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 178. We have concerns with the content of this policy and with its timing and process.

Public education should not be a partisan issue. Across Ohio, millions of students, parents, and families depend on our public schools and on the work of teachers, paraprofessionals, intervention specialists, counselors, social workers, nurses, speech language therapists, and other educators. Public school employees and public school families can be found across the political spectrum.

The composition of the State Board of Education, which has a majority of members elected by the public in non-partisan elections, is a statement that despite our many differences, we can come to the table to collaboratively support Ohio's students and schools. The remainder of the Board, eight positions appointed by the Governor and affirmed by the Senate, allows Ohio's chief executive to have a considerable voice in education policy.

This balance of directly elected and appointed members serves the Board well and leads to collaborative decision making. We oppose this legislation because it would strip the State Board of Education from most of its current responsibilities and would place too much control over Ohio's schools in the hands of the Governor.

As educators, we need broad, non-partisan consensus among policymakers supporting the essential mission of public schools to advance education and opportunity for Ohio's students. Passing SB 178 would increase the partisan rancor over education policy and that would be detrimental to our students' success.

Aside from this fundamental disagreement over the policy, we also object to the rushed process of this bill. This bill represents a seismic shift in how education is governed in this state. This bill proposes placing more power in the executive branch, which will silence the public's voice, access, and transparency regarding education policymaking. The students, parents, and educators in this state deserve a thorough and inclusive process for determining what, if any, changes need to be made to how our education system is governed - not a rushed process during lame duck. An implementation date of July 1, 2023 seems like a heavy lift for these

changes to occur without a comprehensive discussion and will only exacerbate any problems or frustrations that currently exist.

As both President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers and Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio AFL-CIO, I can assure you that I, and the membership I represent, care deeply about career tech education and workforce development. I am on the AFT national Career Tech Committee and was recently part of a study trip in Germany to study the relationship between government, industry, and the education system. OFT wants to be an integral part of conversations about how to advance career tech education in our state, as well as how we best meet the needs of all students regardless of their future pathways. We do not believe; however, that suddenly changing the governance structure during a lame duck session will necessarily lead to the desired outcomes. Rather, we recommend that we all work together to create better connections between existing entities to create more cohesion in the system.

I urge the Committee not to pass this bill, and I trust that the Department and the Board will swiftly address the concerns raised by the Committee. Any changes that you feel are necessary to the State Board of Education can be dealt with in the next General Assembly rather than in this hectic, short lame duck session.