

Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

December 7, 2022

Sub. S.B. 178

Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chairman Blessing, and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 178. My name is Robert Hill I grew up in Ohio and currently live with my family in Ohio. In addition to raising our children, my wife and I volunteer with several youth mentorship programs.

Reading the bill's sponsor's testimony, Senator Reineke, I share in his concern that there is a disproportionate focus in Ohio's education system on higher education. Higher education can have benefits, and is needed, but America is facing a major shortage of skilled trade workers. The Department of Labor highlights a major shortage of skilled labor is on the horizon as significantly more skilled laborers are retiring than are in the training and apprenticeship programs. Many studies find that school counselors and officials play a major role in this shortage by not emphasizing the skilled trades as a viable option and only focus on higher education.

My opposition to S.B. 178 is that the solution would do little to address the concern highlighted in Senator Reineke's testimony. Removing the current structure of mostly directly elected members on the State School Board will not ensure the concerns are addressed. Even with State House directives to the proposed Governor appointed board there is no guarantee that the board will take seriously those directives to address the concerns. Often times, the unelected board is able to shroud their actual intentions and actions in a thin veneer of abiding by the directives, all the while actively working against those directives.

Removing the direct elections removes the ability to hold the proposed unelected School Board accountable for their policies and actions. Voters can have significantly different reasons to vote for a particular State School Board member than for the Governor, which under the proposed structure, creates a major disconnect for the will of the people to be implemented. An elected Governor may take their election as a sign that all of their policies are the desire of the citizens of Ohio, even though many of those votes were not cast due to their view of State School Board policy.

Having directly elected State School Board Members is the only way to ensure the will and desire of the citizens of Ohio can be heard for State School Board issues. In our digital age it is very easy for everyone to find their elected officials and express their opinion through direct discourse or through voting. Taking away the ability to express our opinions through direct elections goes straight against the concept of our country - "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Having locally elected school boards is needed, just as having state elected State School Board members.

Furthermore, SB178 moves away from what Ohioans voted for in 1953 when they amended the Ohio Constitution to create the State Board of Education. It was intended to put the decision making in the power of an elected Board that would be held accountable directly by the voters across the state rather than through a proxy vote for a Governor when many other issues are factored in who to elect.

Whenever a governmental change is being considered a key question is, can the desired outcome be achieved with less complexity? In this case, I believe that there are many other options that are less complicated and would lead to more success in addressing the concerns. Since this testimony is not focused on alternatives to the proposed S.B. 178, I will not expound on those here.

A second question that must be considered is, what are the unintended consequences on the proposal? In this case, a major unintended consequence is that every 4 years the direction of the entire State School Board could drastically change. This creates major uncertainty for everyone in Ohio's education system – educators, parents, students, and employers. The students would be especially harmed by a constant barrage of changes, further hampering their ability to succeed.

For these reasons and many more, that time does permit me to detail, I am firmly opposed to S.B. 178 and respectfully request that the bill be pulled from consideration. This bill will harm students, parents, educators and Ohio employers.

Sincerely,

Robert Hill