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**Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Dec. 13, 2022
Testimony on HB 497
Jennifer Glenn, Ohio School Psychologists Association**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 497. As a school psychologist and as a representative of the Executive Board of the Ohio School Psychologists Association, I support this legislation that would eliminate a legal requirement for retention under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee (TGRG).

Most studies conducted over the past four decades on the effectiveness of grade retention did not find it to be successful in remediating academic deficits (e.g., Andrew, 2014; Fruehwirth et al., 2016). Potential disadvantages of grade retention for failure to pass a high stakes reading test include simple repetition of an entire grade level of curriculum, including areas in which the child is successful, negative impact on social–emotional well-being (e.g., self-concept, self-confidence, academic motivation, behavior, and interpersonal relationships), and the extra costs associated with retention to both families, school districts, and the government (Goos et.al, 2021).

There is also evidence of significant ethnic and racial disparities in retention rates. Both Black and Hispanic children are retained at higher rates than their White peers (de Brey et al., 2019; Peguero et al., 2021), even when school characteristics, such as availability of school resources or whether the school is in an urban, suburban, or rural community are accounted for (Peguero et al., 2021). English learners (e.g., Buckmaster, 2019; Duran, 2008) and those with learning disabilities (e.g., Barnett et al., 1996) are also disproportionately retained. Research does not indicate benefit for these groups; in fact, retention is associated with high drop-out rates in English learners and does not positively impact their language development (Buckmaster, 2019).



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There is evidence to suggest that children who are retained have higher rates of special education placement, absenteeism, suspensions, and dropping out (Goos et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2018; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009; Stearns et al., 2007). The likelihood of children with disabilities dropping out of school also substantially increases when they have been retained, with the odds increasing as much as 33% for those with learning disabilities and 73% for those with emotional and behavioral disorders (Reschly & Christenson, 2006). The negative effects of retention appear to carry over beyond the pre-K–12 years, with retained children less likely to pursue higher education and more likely to have lower socioeconomic status and receive governmental financial assistance (Goos et al., 2021).

Not every child who has difficulty acquiring reading skills has an educational disability. Lack of access to early exposure to language and early activities, exposure to trauma, and a family history of reading difficulties can be factors. And not every child who performs poorly on high stakes reading tests are poor readers. They may have test-tasking anxiety, have slept poorly the night before due to domestic or community situations, may be experiencing homelessness, or food insecurity. Those can all play a role in a child's ability to perform well on a high stakes test. Without specific, targeted interventions that address their specific needs, most retained children do not catch up to their nonretained peers (Jimerson, 2001).

Research suggests several alternatives to retention. A Multi-Tiered Systems of Support framework can be used to address underlying academic weaknesses and social–emotional difficulties (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012). Investing in trauma-informed approaches, universal early childhood and early intervention programs, and evidence-based, school-wide programs that provide supports across classrooms and intervention tiers is recommended. Decades of research in *early* reading instruction has resulted in scientifically based approaches to reading instruction. These rely on explicitly and systematically teaching children sound-symbol relationships, or what is commonly referred to as phonics, as well as methods to support exposure to rich literature and meaningful oral language experiences that support comprehension. House Bill 583, the legislation that changed some components of the dyslexia support laws, also provides support and guidance for how districts should



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approach reading instruction and early remediation of reading concerns. Reading programs that provide developmentally appropriate, intensive, and direct instruction strategies to promote the reading skills of low-performing children with reading problems should be used across the state.

Using existing structures such as response to intervention and positive behavioral interventions and supports facilitate the type of proactive, rather than reactive, approaches needed (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012). Districts can provide extended year, extended day, and summer school programs that facilitate the development of academic skills. Such strategies will help all children receive interventions designed to address areas of identified need in order to promote child success. Removing the retention requirement will remove stressors for children, educators, and families, and will allow more instructional time to be spent on teaching children how to read, rather than on how to take tests. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of removing this requirement. I will be happy to respond to any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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