

Good afternoon,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. I want to begin with a little about me. My name is Austin and I live in central Ohio, I'm an educator, and I'm a parent. I *should* be at work, teaching my second graders how to read, write, and do arithmetic. Instead, I'm here, fighting for common sense in hopes that education will be left out of politics. You might be curious about my credentials – I have a bachelors degree in early childhood education and a masters degree in educational administration. I want to briefly mention that, while I am an educator, I do not represent my school, district, or any other organization I may be affiliated with.

Senate bill one, the bill that strips the powers from ODE and hands them to a board appointed by the governor, is extremely dangerous. While some members of this body believe that teachers are bad and trying to indoctrinate our students, I stand before you today as an educator to let you know that this theory is simply false. One of the biggest problems in the American Education System is the severe lack of respect for teachers and this theory, and this bill, only adds to this disrespect.

Now, there is something we can agree on! Our education system needs severe change, but allowing a political party to make the decisions is NOT the change that is needed. By handing the decision-making powers to a board, you're handing over the decision-making to a political party that will decide what our children learn, how they learn, and much more. I ask each of the members in support of this bill a simple question – have you ever been a teacher or any other education professional? If you haven't, you have absolutely no right to make decisions that will impact the 1.6 million students and the more than 100,000 teachers in our state. Politics have no place in education and I refuse to allow our state to become the next Florida.

Instead of focusing on gaining control, maybe this body should focus on the many other issues in our Ohio schools. For example

- Ohio ranks 31 in education;
- Teachers are severely underpaid (my rent is about half my salary);
- Teacher population is severely disproportionate compared to student population;
- More than 21,000 students in Ohio are homeless;
- Only 30-40 percent of students achieve proficiency, according to national data;
- On average, Black and Hispanic students achieve at lower levels than white students on fourth grade state exams;
- On average, economically disadvantaged students achieve at lower levels than their peers on fourth and eighth grade state exams;
- Funding is ripped away from public schools in order to provide the option for students to attend private schools through the voucher program, creating major issues with public schools;
- ACT scores are the lowest in over 20 years, especially in underprivileged populations
- Only 20% of students reach college readiness scores in all academic content areas before graduating high school;

- 13% (208,000) of students do not graduate within four years of high school; and
- Ohio spends just over \$13,000 per student yearly, whereas Ohio spends more than double that on the prisoners who commit violent crimes, handing them iPads, television, and more during their punishment for their crimes.

The list goes on, but the only focus of this bill is simply gain control. That's exactly what it's about, control. I know it's been a very long, tiring, exhausting, and mentally challenge few years. However, we have to stop the pettiness and start using political positions for what they are for – bettering our country. I'm sick and tired of the arguments, the bigotry, and the hypocrisy coming from our representatives. I think it's safe to say that everyone is. While I agree that change is needed in the education system, I heavily disagree that allowing a political body to control our schools is going to be beneficial, because I promise you that it will not be.

If this bill passes, I expect to see a wave of teachers leave teaching, larger than the wave we have already. On February 16, 2023, an article was posted by an Ohio news source with the headline “Teachers wanted: What Ohio is doing after thousands of educators left the classroom”. The article goes on to mention that, since the start of the pandemic, Ohio has lost approximately 17,000 teachers to other fields. The solution? The article mentions, and I quote, “School districts are hanging their hopes on young adults that their interest in becoming a teacher goes further than graduation”. Hope – that's apparently the solution we have to offer. The move of power from ODE to a board allows Ohio's supermajority Statehouse and governor to tightly control public education policy, budget, funding, and priorities with little oversight or accountability. SB 1 injects partisanship and politics into Ohio's nonpartisan public education system. I promise you, if this bill passes, the 17,000 teachers who have already left the field will be joined by many other teachers in our state.

Unfortunately, our political system has moved away from a democratic system that allows representatives to converse over bills and flush out all their problems. Instead, the party in the supermajority seeks to rip this system up by creating bills that destroy what we've worked so hard for, simply so they can control us. I demand this bill be sent directly to the shredder and new legislation proposed that will actually benefit students, teachers, and the Ohio education system. While I know this bill will pass because of the unbalanced power in our Statehouse, I demand Governor DeWine do the right thing and veto this bill the moment it comes across his desk.

While I am finished with my speech, I am not finished fighting for what is right. I hope to see change and I will continue fighting for what is right. I hope you will seriously consider the testimony you hear today when voting for this bill.

Thank you.

All data, statistics, and facts came from the following sources:

- <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/ohio>
- <https://www.ohiobythenumbers.com/>
- <https://www.vera.org/publications/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends-prison-spending>
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