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HOUSE ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Opposition Testimony on Sub. SB 1

Presented by Melissa Cropper, President of Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Douglas Swearingen, Vice Chair Nick Santucci and Ranking Member Upchurch, and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). Thank you for this opportunity to testify today in opposition to SB 1.

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 our 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 together to 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 protects the democratic process of allowing the public to choose Board members from their area who represent their interests while also holding the Governor and the Senate accountable for shaping policy through their appointed members.

In the 2022 general election, as well as in previous cycles, people with education backgrounds and ties to their communities ran for school board seats with the intent of shaping policy, not just dealing with licenses, property transfers, and other compliance pieces. They shared their policy ideas and their vision for education with the public, and the public voted for them to represent their area of the state on education issues. This is significant because State Board of Education elections are fundamentally different from Gubernatorial elections or Senate/House elections.

Governors and Senators and Representatives have broad platforms covering a spectrum of

issues encompassing healthcare, tax policy, infrastructure, environment, and a plethora of other issues. State Board of Education members, however, are elected based upon their education policy alone. Voters choose who best represents them on this one single issue. This bill is telling them that their decision does not matter.

I have heard person after person, either sitting where you are or standing where I am, say again and again that people do not even know who represents them on the State Board of Education or what their stances are on the issues. In other words, the indication is that our parents, families, and community members are either too stupid or care too little about their children's futures to choose who represents them in these decisions. If you truly feel that way, then our entire democratic system on which this country is founded is in jeopardy because the same people who voted in the school board elections also voted for Governor, for every one of you, and for every elected position in this state.

Trust me, I have grave disagreements with some State Board of Education members, but I also have great faith in our democratic system when it is allowed to function the way it was intended without interference, gerrymandering, or changing of the rules. Given that the Board of Education members have been elected to represent their constituencies on education policy, it would be a grave disservice to our electorate and to our democratic process to change their roles.

Throughout these hearings, we have heard that education is too disconnected from the workforce and that this bill will bring the two into alignment. We wholeheartedly agree that there needs to be alignment. While education is not just about preparing our students for the workforce, it is critical that children and parents know what opportunities are available to them and understand what it takes for students to pursue their career interests. The Ohio Department of Education has actually done a lot of work in bringing together the K-12 community, the business community, and the higher education community to identify best practices in creating these alignments and for spreading them across the state.

The Ohio Federation of Teachers is strongly in favor of promoting more career tech/career pathway work but we do not believe that it takes a switch in governance structures to make that happen. In fact, we see strong alignment in many of our local unions across the state including in Toledo particularly at the Toledo Technology Academy, in Cleveland, in Cincinnati, and in New Lexington where they are working with a business advisory council of about 42 members to plan and build a workforce development center. There are multiple other examples across the state where these strong partnerships are happening. In order to strengthen and advance that work, we need to look at four areas, all of which can be done without changing structure:

1. How can the relationship between the education field and the Governors' Executive Workforce Board be strengthened? We would recommend adding the Superintendent of Public Instruction and representatives from education organizations such as the Ohio Federation of Teachers to the Board.

2. What federal and/or state policies impede career pathways? For example, I have heard multiple career tech teachers tell me that it hurt their programs when students were required to take certain courses, such as Algebra II, instead of what they used to call related courses, meaning courses where the content directly aligned with the career pathway.
3. How can best practices for local implementation be better spread across the districts?
4. How can the legislature incentivize businesses to work with local school districts to create opportunities for students?

We share with the sponsor of this bill the desire to provide students with every opportunity to succeed. While we disagree about the need to change the governance structure, we want to continue to work with the legislature to do what we can to help students. Thank you again for this opportunity. I will be happy to answer any questions.