

**Katie Baker**  
**HB 117 Proponent Testimony**  
**Ohio House Primary and Secondary Edu. Committee**  
**May 2, 2023**

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and fellow Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today as a proponent of House Bill 117.

This piece of legislation would positively change Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law by removing the consequence of mandatory retention, as well as eliminating the fall administration of the Ohio State Test in English Language Arts. It also continues to maintain the focus on supporting students' reading progress through quality interventions and instruction. My name is Katie Baker, and I come before you today as a mom of two boys- one now in fourth grade and my youngest will enter Kindergarten next fall.

As a parent of a fourth grader, I can speak first hand to the negative impact the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law has had on my child. This law did not positively impact my child's reading achievement and created significant stress in his life. While well intended, it is time we analyze the impact and effectiveness of a law that was put into place in 2012.

The State Legislature has been discussing this law for a few years, and during previous hearings ample proponent testimony has been provided by many from across the state.

Based upon previous testimony, you're aware of the overabundance of testing related to this law. I have shared that my son has had to take 15 tests related to this law and it would have been 16 if schools did not shut down in the spring of 2020.

You're aware that teachers do not receive the results of the tests in a timely manner and therefore are not able to immediately address needs to impact learning.

You've heard about other diagnostic tests that all schools give to measure progress that do provide immediate results.

Prior testimony has painted the picture of the stress and anxiety Ohio's 8 and 9 year olds face with the threat of mandatory retention if they do not reach the promotion score.

I'm sure you're also questioning why we would make such serious educational decisions based upon an online test, in which kids have to type a multi-paragraph essay, within a set time frame, when they have never experienced formal typing instruction.

Ohio's legislators have debated and discussed ways in which we can support Ohio's students post Covid. Like many parents of current third graders, you too are advocating for a safe harbor for these kids because they were in kindergarten and first grade during the height of the pandemic.

And, I'm certain you are all left to wonder if this online test is a true and valid measure of a student's reading ability?

Our system of retention will never allow a student to catch up. By withholding access to grade level standards, and only teaching below grade level, it is no surprise that by the end of the year, they will remain below grade level. Our current system perpetuates achievement gaps.

House Bill 117 does not remove the mandatory reading interventions, the Reading Improvement Monitoring Plans, the ongoing communication with parents regarding their child's progress, the mandatory reading endorsements and additional teaching credentials for 3rd grade teachers; or any of the aspects in the recently passed reading Dyslexia law, including mandatory professional development, screening and research based interventions. House Bill 117 eliminates the components of the Law that are harmful to Ohio's Students.

My husband and I are our sons' most important advocates. However, the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law does not provide parents any rights to object or disagree with the consequence of retention. My children do not meet any of the exemptions under the law, and Ohio does not have a testing "opt-out" choice. Therefore, according to page 15 of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Guidance Manual, if my children do not take the state tests, they will not have a score and thus be automatically retained until a promotion score is reached. Parents deserve a seat at the table, and should have the right to voice their refusal of retention. In all other retention situations, parents have the ultimate decision as to whether their child will be retained. I'm asking the committee today to provide me with this right as it relates to the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

My husband and I have provided the following to our boys that has directly impacted their academic achievement:

- Proper prenatal care and nutrition,
- An extensive home library with rich stories and nightly reading since birth,
- 3 years of private preschool,
- Financial ability to hold our children from entering Kindergarten until they were 6 years old, ensuring their brain development was ready for the academic demands,
- All day, everyday Kindergarten,
- Financially able to provide daily tutoring and home instruction during the various learning modes and closures during the pandemic,
- Explicit phonics instruction programs used at school and reinforced at home,

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- A home computer, additional technology and reliable internet access,
- And both my husband and I have attended every single parent-teacher conference.

Despite all of this, my husband and I are still not able to fully participate in the decisions made about our boys' education. I also ask, how equal is the playing field for Ohio's students?

As you consider your next steps, it is my hope that you remember my son and the countless other 8 and 9 year old students who carry the burden of adult accountability on their backs. Let's humanize the data because all of the test scores were earned by young children in Ohio. Let's focus on increased support and interventions rather than consequences placed on children who come to school each day to learn and grow to the best of their abilities.

Thank you for listening to my testimony and for favorably considering House Bill 117. At this time, I'm happy to answer any questions from members of the committee.

Sincerely,  
Katie Baker