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**House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
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Written Testimony on HB 117

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Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 117.

The Ohio School Psychologists Association, which represents more than 800 school psychologists across Ohio, supports this legislation that would eliminate a legal requirement for retention under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee (TGRG). The bill would remove the requirement that students not meeting the required score on the third-grade English language arts assessment be held back but it would not eliminate the duty of districts to provide intervention and remediation services to students reading below grade level.

The majority of studies conducted over the past 40 years on the effectiveness of grade retention do not support its value in remediating academic shortcomings (e.g., Andrew, 2014; Fruehwirth et al., 2016; Hwang & Cappella, 2019; Jimerson, 2001). Studies even show that students who repeat a grade before they enter high school are at increased risk of dropping out even when other variables, including overall academic achievement and disciplinary records, are considered (Hughes et al., 2018; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009; Stearns et al., 2016). Additionally, retained students from minoritized backgrounds drop out at disproportionately higher rates than white students (Hughes et al., 2018).

As Rep. Robinson mentioned in sponsor testimony, research on the TGRG published by Ohio State University showed minimal impact to test scores since the law's enactment. No meaningful or significant improvements were seen in fourth-grade reading achievement. Since enactment in 2012, the retention component of the TGRG has not shown benefits that outweigh the potential risks associated with retention.

Students who are performing below grade level should not be retained, but instead receive support through the required reading improvement and monitoring plan - an intensive, evidence-based intervention plan with frequent progress monitoring. School psychologists work collaboratively in the school setting to develop these plans, conducting screenings or assessments, developing individualized interventions tailored to student needs, and progress monitoring intervention fidelity and efficacy. Passing HB 117 allows school psychologists (as well as teachers, related service providers, administrators, and all of the student's educational team) to focus on these proactive approaches to support students and make decisions that support the child as a whole person, not just as a score on a test.



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The retention component of the law was eliminated these past three years because of COVID-19, but schools continued to proactively develop and implement reading improvement and monitoring plans for students, just as they would under HB 117. Passing this bill simply removes the reactive part – retention – that feels punitive toward the student who just needs more help.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this important legislation. I would be happy to field any questions.

References

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