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State Representative, 79th District

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Lightbody and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 206 – which aims to grant greater flexibility for schools to expel dangerous individuals and also produce a reentry plan for the safety and protection of their students and staff.

Earlier this year I had a conversation with a parent from a local public school in my district, and she expressed her concern as a student who had been expelled from school was to be readmitted back into the district without any type of assessment. This caused a sense of anxiety and panic amongst the other students, including her own son, at the school who knew they would soon be interacting again with their peer.

After learning of these concerns within my district, I was pleased to sign onto this legislation with Representative Click. As he mentioned, this is essentially a reintroduction of House Bill 334 from the 130th General Assembly from then Representatives Bill Hayes and Jay Hottinger. It passed out of the House with bipartisan support in 2014.

Under current law, school districts are able to expel students for no longer than 80 days, or up to a year for bringing a firearm or knife to schools, making a bomb threat, or committing a criminal offense that results in serious physical harm. Unfortunately, the current system remains too rigid for school administrators to adequately ensure the safety of their students and staff. Upon the completion of these expulsions and without having committed an additional illegal or expellable offense, schools are required to readmit students even if they continue to see a clear and present danger.

What Representative Click and I are looking to do is provide more flexibility and local control to school administrators when they are dealing with incredibly difficult and stressful situations. Student and staff safety is our priority, and HB 206 allows superintendents to administer expulsions for imminent and severe endangerment to the health and safety of the school as they see fit within their districts, but it also requires a clear path to readmission, instructing the superintended to develop conditions upon which the expelled student must complete to be reinstated.

We feel these decisions should be left up to school administrators, who understand the complexities of a situation as it occurs in front of them. This is why we have left the language permissive, simply allowing a board of education to authorize superintendents to take advantage of these provisions. These are the people who know what is best for their school districts and should have the tools needed for the continued safety of their students.

Thank you for your time and consideration, Rep. Click and I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.