



Senator Michele Reynolds - 3rd District

Senate Bill 168 - Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary & Secondary Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify before you in support of Senate Bill 168, which will enact a number of educational reforms and provide needed regulatory flexibility for our schools to more efficiently operate and provide an education to our children.

The bill before you is the result of conversations with stakeholders from our public schools who have identified areas of state law for suggested elimination, adjustments, or other revisions that will allow our schools to better focus on their core mission of educating our students. Accordingly, this bill incorporates several changes requested by school officials. Among these changes, I would like to highlight a few in particular.

As we know, licensure is a critical area in which state law influences the ability for individuals to engage in a particular field of work or other occupation. Licensure can provide an important safeguard for the public, but must be appropriate and adequate to the purpose for which it is established. I have heard, as I am sure all of you have heard, of the ongoing concern over teacher shortages that affect many districts and schools within our communities. This has a serious negative impact on our students, and upon our workforce more broadly. SB 168 seeks to address this shortage by making necessary changes to the state's educational attainment requirements for particular educator licenses.

Current law stipulates that educators must attain a master's degree in order to be licensed as a senior professional educator or as a lead professional educator. It further establishes, frequently in administrative rule but not in statute, educational requirements for licensure as school administrators, who must also receive a master's degree in order to be licensed by the state. SB 168 right-sizes these requirements by adjusting the mandated educational attainment for teachers seeking licensure as senior professional or lead professional educators, for professional administrators, and alternative superintendents—only a bachelor's degree would be required for purposes of receiving and maintaining a state license.

In so doing, SB 168 empowers educators to continue focusing on their key role as educators of our children. I am sure that many educators will continue to pursue additional education in order

to continue serving in these roles, but by eliminating mandatory laws that require every teacher in the state to spend thousands of dollars and years of additional time to achieve a master's degree or higher, we will alleviate pressures on our teachers and increase the likelihood that they will remain in the teaching field for many years to come.

The bill also permissively grants districts the option to hire an individual who has at least a master's degree, but not an educator license, to teach in that district, so long as they pass a content exam prescribed by the State Board of Education and pass a background check. I would like to stress the importance of local control and content knowledge in this context—the provision is permissive for both the applicant and for the local district. The individual would also be required to complete professional development in the same manner as a licensed teacher, as determined by the district's professional development committee.

SB 168 also permits local school districts to develop an alternative framework for evaluating teachers and principals in the employ of that district that they may use instead of the state's teacher or principal evaluation system. This extra flexibility will aid districts and educators while still maintaining the requirement they be evaluated.

The bill also adjusts the state's requirements around dyslexia training to permit a school administrator to determine the number of hours their staff must receive in dyslexia interventions, still between 6-18 hours as prescribed by law. Currently this can only be decided by the Ohio Dyslexia Committee.

Furthermore, SB 168 would empower district professional development committees, which are responsible for approving coursework and activities for teachers seeking to renew their license, to credit time educators spend completing statutorily prescribed professional development training toward their licensure renewal.

The bill also eliminates the requirement that districts must have a separate public hearing for adopting their school calendar each year, permitting them to adopt the calendar as part of another board meeting. It also permits, rather than requires, districts to enter into supplemental contracts with teachers assigned to teach courses for high school credit that are taught at times outside the district's normal school day, and removes the requirement that districts utilize seniority when considering reductions to their non-teaching staff. It additionally establishes a new option in state statute for out of state license holders to receive a one-year nonrenewable permit when a local district seeks to employ that person in their school, and allows an expedited process for a school to notify the public of their intent to re-hire a retiring teacher if the need for their re-hiring is urgent and the district provides explanation to the public demonstrating this need.

The bill also proposes to eliminate several sections or provisions within Title 33 of the Revised Code that have been determined to be obsolete, defunct, or otherwise no longer necessary. These sections were reviewed in cooperation with the Department of Education & Workforce to ensure that the provisions are not operational and may be eliminated or appropriately modified.

Chairman Bird, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 168. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.