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Testimony  
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee  
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Provided by:  
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Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN)

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ben Cech, and I am here on behalf of the Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN) to express our concerns related to Substitute Senate Bill 29.

Before I elaborate on the concerning sections of Sub. SB 29, I would like to quickly highlight the role the Management Council of the OECN plays in providing quality educational support to Ohio's K-12 students. The OECN, established in 1979, is a collective of 16 Information Technology Centers (ITCs) strategically located throughout the state. ITCs work collaboratively to deliver essential services to educational institutions in Ohio, including public schools, private schools, charter schools, ESCs, JVSs, and CTCs. Among these critical deliveries to schools are

- fiscal services such as payroll, HR and accounting;
- managing student data for myriad purposes from scheduling and grading to attendance and parent communication;
- EMIS data, which drives school funding and district report cards;
- Broadband and internet for schools that is delivered across the OECN at 100GB; and
- INFOhio, Ohio's K-12 digital library.

While these essential service areas are the OECN's primary focus, it is important to recognize that they are just a small part of the extensive support the OECN provides to Ohio schools. One key role the Management Council fills is coordinating collaborative purchases for the OECN, which enables Ohio schools to secure the lowest prices on software. For instance, by negotiating a five year statewide K12 contract in 2019 for Zoom video licenses (which retailed for \$185 a seat at the time) for \$5 a license before the pandemic, the Management Council saved schools across the state millions of dollars on critical video communications software, which of course became a fundamental necessity for our schools to operate. Similarly, the Management Council has pursued substantial discounts on cyber security products and services, providing those to Ohio's schools at deeply discounted pricing through the OECN.

This comprehensive description of the OECN sets the stage for understanding our concerns with Sub. SB 29. While Sub. SB 29 aims to address important issues related to the use of technology in education, specifically student device security, there are significant segments of the bill that warrant reconsideration. Recognizing the full scope of the work of the OECN is essential to grasp how this bill could impact OECN operations and, consequently, Ohio schools.



Today, I would like to outline key concerning segments of Sub. SB 29:

1. Definition of "Student-Issued Device:" The bill's definition of "student-issued device" includes both hardware and software, which covers third-party devices, such as MacBooks, Chromebooks, and other laptops, and all software installed on these devices. As a result, any software on a student's device would be subject to the same reporting requirements as the device itself. This definition is so broad that it encompasses essential tools like anti-cheating software, social/emotional alert software, MFA, password storage software, video communication software, and even Adobe and Microsoft products. Without amending this definition, we risk restricting the use of everyday tools that are crucial for student learning and safety. We recommend amending the definition of "student-issued device" to remove hardware and software entirely.
2. Definition of "Technology Provider:" The current definition of "technology provider" is overly vague and will lead to additional confusion regarding its applicability. We propose amending the current definition to focus on non-governmental providers to reduce ambiguity.
3. 72-Hour Parental Notification Requirement: Another concern is the 72-hour parental notification requirement following an active monitoring event and its impact on E-rate and other federal funding programs for schools. In 2023, Ohio schools collectively received \$75 million from the E-rate program to help subsidize internet connectivity costs. To comply with E-rate, schools must follow specific monitoring protocols outlined in CIPA (the Child Internet Protection Act), including daily device monitoring, which as currently written would result in parents receiving daily notifications from their child's school district. This could jeopardize the substantial federal funding Ohio schools depend on if schools find this requirement too burdensome and choose to opt out of the E-rate program. Removing the 72-hour notification requirement would allow schools to remain compliant with E-rate and CIPA. Alternatively, we are open to amending the bill to include an opt-out option for parents who do not wish to receive daily notifications. However, this would necessitate additional language to ensure that monitoring remains compliant with E-rate and CIPA.

These concerns underscore the potential unintended consequences of Sub. SB 29. It is crucial to address these issues to ensure that the bill enhances, rather than hinders, educational technology in Ohio schools.

In conclusion, while we agree with and support the concept of enhancing student device security, the current provisions in Sub. SB 29 present challenges that could hinder the effectiveness and safety of educational technology in Ohio schools. As the custodians of student data in Ohio for the last 45 years, we urge the committee to reconsider these aspects to ensure the bill supports both student security and educational efficiency while ameliorating any unintended consequences.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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