

Senate Bill 208 Proponent Testimony
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Senate Bill 208. My name is Steve Tugend, I chair the Central Ohio Defense Group and am an attorney at Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter. In my capacity of the Chair of the Defense Group, I offer this testimony as a proponent of Senate Bill 208 sponsored by Senator Roegner.

The Central Ohio Defense Group is an organization comprised of government, nonprofit and corporate members that is concerned about preserving and growing defense-related jobs in the Central Ohio Region. The members of the group include Columbus 2020, the City of Columbus, the Columbus Partnership, One Columbus, the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, the City of Canal Winchester, Battelle, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, the City of Whitehall, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, The Ohio State University, Franklin County, the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority, and Kegler, Brown, Hill + Ritter.

The impact of Ohio's Department of Defense (DoD) employers in our region is significant. The DoD payroll for about 14,000 jobs is just under \$800 million annually and this yields an economic impact of about \$3 billion.

And we need to be vigilant in our protection of these jobs and resulting economic impact. Every few years, the Department of Defense undertakes a process known as Base Realignment and Closure (or "BRAC") where the country's military installations are evaluated using a cost benefit analysis. Those installations that score well are kept open or even expanded. Those that score poorly are closed. It has been since 2005 since the Pentagon last went through a BRAC process, so we believe that the next one is long overdue.

Increasingly, the Pentagon has indicated that one of the key evaluation criteria that will be considered in the next round of BRAC will be how military-friendly the installation's state laws are. Moreover, basing decisions are increasingly influenced by these criteria as well.

It is for this reason that the Central Ohio Defense Group is interested in Senate Bill 208. In short, the legislation, if it becomes law, will make Ohio a more military-friendly state and, as a result, a more attractive site for military missions and jobs.

Senate Bill 208 creates an exception under Ohio's public school interdistrict open enrollment policy to require school districts that otherwise entirely prohibit open enrollment or only accept open enrollment of students from adjacent districts to permit a student who is not a native student of the district to open enroll in the district if the student's parent is an active-duty member of the armed forces and is stationed in Ohio. Essentially the bill states that public schools must open enroll the student of a military family as long as that school has the capacity for the student.

We appreciate the commendable sacrifices that our brave service men and women make, as well as their family members, having to move around the country and military bases around the world on a frequent basis. According to the Pentagon, military families relocate every 2 to 4 years, which can be very disruptive to these families and especially school age children who must adjust to new homes, new schools, new teachers, and new classmates. Passing Senate Bill 208 will help ease the transition for our military families by enabling them to enroll their children into the public school of their choice.

The Central Ohio Defense Group joins the U.S. Department of Defense in support of this legislation as good public policy to help make Ohio a more military friendly state. We also appreciate how the legislation has guardrails that prohibit school districts from charging tuition to the families of military children who enroll under this narrow exception. This military family friendly legislation should not be burdensome to our public schools as they do not have to enroll a student if they are over capacity.

From my experience, the importance of the BRAC process necessitates that our state ensure that its military facilities have both the physical and legal infrastructure that is supportive of military missions. This proposed legislation advances that goal. The U.S. Department of Defense is more likely to locate military installations and maintain them in states that are supportive of those who have worn our country's uniform.

This bill helps military families with children ease the burden when they have to move frequently with the transition to a new school by enabling them to choose the school of their choice. It sends the message that military families are welcome here. When active-duty military members feel welcome in a state they will often want to stay in Ohio when they retire where they can use their military training and skills to benefit Ohio employers as taxpaying civilians. The least Ohio can do is to ease this barrier to help make our military families more welcome in this state and to better position us to attract and retain military jobs.

Chair Manning and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.