



February 21, 2023 | Testimony in opposition to SB1 | Senate Education Committee

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today in opposition to SB1, a bill that would move significant authority and decision-making power from the State Board of Education and overhaul major components of the mission and focus of the Ohio Department of Education.

Equality Ohio is a statewide education and advocacy organization dedicated to pursuing lived and legal equality for LGBTQ+ Ohioans. As advocates for LGBTQ+ people and their families, we work to ensure that their freedoms are protected, and that includes the freedom to engage in direct advocacy on behalf of their families.

SB1 would take away access and opportunities to engage in direct advocacy on issues related to education, at a time when public schools have become a venue where LGBTQ+ families have been bullied, harassed, and even subject to censorship of discussions of their own lives or identities.

As recently as this past December, the State Board of Education passed a resolution that specifically targeted transgender youth. After months of debate, a resolution that attempted to gut nondiscrimination protections for transgender kids in schools was passed. While we were incredibly disappointed to see that resolution pass, LGBTQ+ families were able to engage in direct advocacy several times both through public hearings and private conversations with their State Board of Education members. The State Board of Education's narrow focus on education issues allowed unique accessibility that would not be available to families if the decision-making authority shifted to unelected officials much more removed from public scrutiny.

Through public presentations and private conversations, LGBTQ+ families were able to push for some removal of the most harmful language in the initial resolution, as well as educate the public around the harms of anti-transgender rhetoric and correct dangerous misconceptions. This direct advocacy led to demonstrable mitigation of the final resolution, and it would be nearly impossible under the provisions outlined in SB1 to advocate on similar proposals in the future.

Instead of having guaranteed public participation time and electoral accountability of State Board of Education members who are not responsive to constituents, SB1 would insulate decision-makers from public scrutiny while taking away a key accountability tool of elections.



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At the same time the tools for families looking to advocate for themselves are being gutted, under-regulated and taxpayer-funded charter schools will be given even more leeway, and future problems that are likely to arise – particularly in light of the myriad of attacks to inclusion of LGBTQ+ students that we are already seeing all around the state and country – will lack any method of remedy.

This bill would not protect families, students, local decision-making control, accountability to voters, or nonpartisanship. Instead, it would insulate decision-makers from scrutiny, create additional barriers for families seeking to advocate for their children, and inject more partisanship into the process by giving incredible power to unelected, partisan, statewide officeholders.

Please vote no on SB1.

Thank you,
Maria Bruno
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Equality Ohio