

Senate Bill One Opposition Testimony from Michelle Newman

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and committee members, my name is Michelle Newman, and I am a resident of Licking County, Ohio. I'm a mom, a marketing director by day, a community volunteer in my "free" time, and an elected State Board of Education member here in the great state of Ohio. I am here to share my personal opposition to Senate Bill One, and I do not speak on behalf of the board.

In November 2020, **270,850** voters elected me to represent the Ninth District of Ohio. The area represented all or part of 12 counties and a constituency of over a million people. I received word on January 31, 2022, through redistricting, that my District was reassigned. For the first year in office, I traveled to my Districts, listening to Superintendents and getting their input on policy. Since redistricting, I have also continued traversing my new designation, traveling some two hours or more each way to the outer reaches of the district.

It's noteworthy to mention that the reassignment was designated by a set of maps that has been found unconstitutional and now no longer exists anywhere except in the redistricting actions for the State Board of Education. I now have the honor of representing District Eight, which includes all or part of 18 counties, including the majority of Appalachian Ohio - running as far south as Meigs County and as far north as Columbiana County. I was removed from the bulk of the counties contingent to Licking that I represented at my election.

My redistricting is relevant information, as one of the main arguments for the passage of SB1 has been the dysfunction of the State Board. The fact is, another body of state government unconstitutionally redistricted me in my office. That's not only dysfunctional, but it's also unconstitutional. While our State Board has most definitely been distracted by issues that are beyond our purview, the citizens of the state of Ohio can confidently say that the same activity happens within these walls as well. Governing is a messy business, and the State Board is no exception. In addition, Senate Bill One undermines the will of voters by usurping our voter-granted authority, issued in 1953, by removing power from an elected body and moving it to the executive branch. The bill will not only bypass the **270,850** voters who elected me, but it should concern every citizen of Ohio.

Second, in its proposed language, this new cabinet agency has no direct accountability to districts, families, or voters. Ohio's recent re-election of Gov DeWine did not indicate such a stark change to education, and even the Governor himself said this bill was not his idea. That means parents and schools have been given no platform, and there will be virtually ZERO accountability in education at the state level for four years. SB1 has provided no specific plans for improving outcomes or providing pathways for public input. The people of Ohio put the State Board of Education in place to ensure there was a level of oversight and accountability and to provide a stage for public feedback in both the rules and policy-making process. SB1 does none of this. Instead, it opens the doors to a mandated curriculum without public input, the loss of local control in our districts, and the withholding of funds if districts don't comply.

I take great pride in visiting the schools in my District. I have traveled hundreds of miles around my District talking with superintendents, fiscal officers, teachers, board members, and kids. Since taking my seat on the Board, the continual question I ask superintendents is "Are you having a problem reaching anyone at ODE" The answer is a resounding no. Direct feedback over a period of two years shows that schools hear back timely from the department - not always with the answers they want to hear but with

prudence and thoughtfulness. I have been continually impressed by the professionalism, skillsets, dedication, and passion of staff members. In addition, there has been some negative rhetoric publicly about department employees being home-based rather than office based in Columbus. I see this as a positive thing, and honestly, I find the argument somewhat ironic since this body is the same group calling for an effective workforce. Many workplaces in our state and around the country are moving towards this hybrid and remote model. The benefit of ODE's model is that it allows the recruitment and hiring of individuals throughout the state, eliminating the need to be Columbus based while utilizing online platforms to encourage quick and easy collaboration from parties around the state. Don't get me wrong, I love our capital city, but for my rural districts, it is beneficial to interact with staff based on where they live. Regional offices make the department relevant and more reflective of its whole community. It's also effective workforce management.

Lastly, the intertwining of the workforce and general education is work already happening in ODE. It is reflected in the budget recommendations the Board approved and put forth this past year. As discussions seem to suggest, it is not a topic that has been ignored. While I, and probably most of the Board, agree that workforce education is essential and deserves more resources, we cannot abandon the idea that an excellent general education that supports the whole child allows students to become resilient lifelong learners capable of stepping into multiple opportunities in their life that lead to a path of success. Data from ODE shows that Ohio students' college enrollment decreased by some 30% between 2010 and 2020.* In comparison, the percentage only dropped 12% nationwide. As a result, fewer Ohio kids are choosing a college. While pursuing higher education isn't for everyone, the full swing to "all workforce all the time" is not a panacea. Let's give both pathways ample ways to succeed.

In conclusion, the State Board and the Department of Education are being used as scapegoats for the decades-long decline in student performance. It is prudent to identify that during this time, our legislative bodies have unconstitutionally underfunded schools and have begun heavily routing taxpayer dollars into private education vouchers that do not hold the same accountability standards as our public schools. Pending legislation in the house, coupled with rhetoric from the Governor, shows that the trend of using taxpayer dollars for private education only indicates that this will not only continue but potentially grow exponentially. If you get tax dollars, you should get the regulations and standard success metrics that public schools face. It's as simple as that, but that's testimony for Senate Bill 11.

I truly believe that if our lawmakers and executive branch joined forces with ODE and the State Board of Education to agree on a statewide mandate to build the best public school system in the country, we would reach that goal. However, Senate Bill one appears to be a full departure from that by subverting voters. I am proud to have a seat on the State Board of Education, and I would like to work with you to develop successful outcomes for kids and schools in the state of Ohio. Thank you for your time.

*<https://www.midstory.org/inside-ohios-college-enrollment-decline/>