

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of The Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

My name is Mike Halaiko, and I am a retired Educator, with over 40 years of service in Ohio Public and Private Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 1.

I urge you to reject Senate Bill 1 and oppose this politically motivated state takeover of public education.

Senator Bill Reineke's proposal to shift oversight of the Department of Education away from the State Board of Education to a "cabinet-level agency" directed by the governor's office is a blatant attempt to infuse partisan politics into public education.

Not only does this bill strip the State Board of Education of its essential roles and authority, it also puts the full authority of public education into the hands of appointed officials, completely silencing the voices of Ohio voters and taxpayers.

The governor already appoints 8 members to the State Board of Education. With that much unilateral control of one of Ohio's Educational Governing Bodies (40%), why would anyone think that placing more control into the governor's hands would be a better idea, especially when the scapegoating of The Board has been permitted, at a time when the governor possesses that much oversight:

I agree with the activist group Honesty for Ohio Education's insight into this bill:

"While proponents center the so-called "dysfunction" and "bureaucracy" of the State Board and ODE as reasons to shift control of public education away from ODE, there are practical ways to address the concerns raised that do not require an overhaul of the entire system. ODE can implement a stronger onboarding process for new State Board members, update and train members on the State Board Policy and Procedures Manual, provide ongoing professional development, evaluate, and upgrade ODE process and procedures, etc.

The State Board has proposed several measures that improve student outcomes and well-being, and address critical disparities around absenteeism, discipline, and literacy. While these measures were supported by the State Board, the legislature failed to advance the legislation. Conversely, several of the extremist culture war legislation peddled by Statehouse leaders was pipelined into the State Board, causing months of distraction away from critical education issues."

I further fully support, Honesty for Ohio Education, in opposing this bill, in their statement that this bill is bad governance:

"The bill is a blatant partisan power grab that shifts oversight of public education from ODE to the governor. The move allows Ohio's supermajority Statehouse and governor to tightly control public education policy, budget, funding, and priorities with little oversight or accountability.

SB 1 injects partisanship and politics into Ohio's nonpartisan public education system. Currently, elected leaders in Ohio's public education system are nonpartisan officers. The bill will allow the governor's cabinet to prioritize a politically fueled and party-driven agenda.

The legislative overhaul is a partisan response to voters overwhelmingly rejecting extremist values when they elected three pro-equity, student-centered State Board members in November 2022. Last year's failed version of SB 1 (SB 178) was a sleeper bill from May 2021 through November 2022, until the Senate fast-tracked the bill during lame duck immediately following the results of the mid-term elections.”

This anti-democratic move prevents Ohioans from thoughtfully researching and deliberating on the bill with a broad range of education stakeholders and experts.

And finally I support Honesty for Ohio Education's view that:

“SB 1 freezes oversight, rules, and regulations around loosely-regulated non-chartered, nonpublic schools and the homeschooling system. This lack of regulation has had detrimental impact on Ohio, public education, students, and families. Leaders need to examine how to tighten oversight and regulations over systems that are easily manipulated, divest state fund away from public education, endanger students, and threaten public safety.

Leaders must eliminate any opportunity for dangerous extremists to use Ohio's homeschooling network to proliferate hate, discrimination, violence, and genocidal values. Further, the current lack of oversight and rules around homeschooling make the system a convenient vehicle to exploit and endanger children with no accountability.”

This is anti-democratic because it is being pushed by the Republican Supermajority in The General Assembly, many who occupy seats from severely gerrymandered districts. Any time power is taken out of the hands of the people, and given to the few, it is undemocratic.

There is no place for partisan politics in public education or centralizing control of education in the governor's office. We know that Ohio students are best served when families work with trained educators and caring board members to determine the face of education in the classroom.

It's time elected leaders stop prioritizing their own political agendas and put Ohio kids at the front of the class! I urge you to vote no on SB 1 and reject any attempts to attach its language as an amendment to another bill.

Thank you,

Mike Halaiko

mihalaj@icloud.com

285 West Columbus Street

Pickerington , Ohio 43147