



CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Larry Keough
Proponent/SB 1
Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee
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Good afternoon Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and Committee members. My name is Larry Keough. I am the associate director for the Catholic Conference of Ohio and legislative advocate for 367 Catholic schools educating more than 109,000 students.

This testimony is limited to our experiences on behalf of Catholic schools and students within the Ohio Department of Education and the State Board of Education.

Our comments are about the structure of Ohio's education governance. They should not be heard as disparaging to Interim Superintendent Stephanie Siddens and the many highly competent and hard-working administrators within the Department and members of the State Board of Education.

Over the years, there has been a need for celerity pertaining to questions about high school graduation, state-sponsored scholarship programs, and, most recently, the After School Child Enrichment Educational Savings Account Program.

When questions are forwarded to ODE's Office of General Counsel, answers may sometimes be delayed for several months, or for more than a year in some instances. The five-year review of select programs is not usually initiated in a timely fashion and in general, the process is too slow. However, our experiences over the past several months have been more favorable.

Historically, we have been frustrated in our attempts to have administrative rules modified before the State Board of Education. In observing the State Board of Education over the past 15 years, there appears to be an arbitrary and capricious approach to educational priorities.

For example, two issues -- the third-grade reading guarantee and preparing high school graduates academically for college -- have been high-priority issues in Ohio for the past several years. Yet, the State Board of Education recommended lowering Ohio's graduation requirements and passed a resolution urging the legislature to drop the retention requirement for third graders who cannot read.

The present system, through no fault of State Board Members and ODE personnel, requires repair. It is time to try the model under SB 1, providing the governor with oversight over education. This would create accountability and efficiency in a more fluid process.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any questions.