

Chairperson Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, My name is Ari Klein, a retired public high school teacher from Cleveland Heights, where I am a lifelong resident.

I am aware that many private citizens and groups have presented testimony in support of and in opposition to Senate Bill 1. I offer a short statement opposing SB 1. My concern centers on the loss of citizen voice by nullifying the responsibilities of the elected members of the State Board of Education. I had similar thoughts when 8 additional non-elected members were added to the Board years ago diluting the votes of the 11 elected members. The additional 8 members are appointed by the Governor and affirmed by the Senate, giving the Governor an unbalanced influence on the Board.

The last minute redistricting in the last election cycle meant that my elected state board member was now assigned a different constituency. My assigned representative was then defeated when citizens in my area organized to educate each other about the candidates. We elected someone who will be conscientious in representing us. Now, only a few minutes into the new term, the most important legislation that the Ohio Senate conjured up was to quash the voices of the newly elected state school board members by shifting responsibilities that have traditionally been part of an elected body to a newly created department that is controlled by the executive branch. Were there no other issues that were deemed to be more vital to the welfare of the State of Ohio? Is taking away the citizen voice the number 1 issue for the current leadership of Ohio? I can think of many other issues that should have been priorities.

What you propose is completely anti-democratic. There is no way to honestly believe that taking away the voices of citizens is in the best interest of our state. The bait and switch you are proposing is bad policy and one that will be remembered by the citizens of Ohio. The matter is simple. Do you honor the citizens of Ohio by allowing the elected members of the state school board to represent the people who elected them or do you create a new body that will strip away the responsibility that we entrusted to our representatives? This bill is shameful and I urge you to defeat it in committee.