

Senate Education Committee
House Bill 33 Proponent Testimony
Shannon Cox, Superintendent
Montgomery County Educational Service Center
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Good afternoon, Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Minority Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of the Educational Service Center (ESC) transportation pilot program proposed in Substitute House Bill (Sub. HB) 33.

As the superintendent for the Montgomery County Educational Service Center, I am writing to urge your support for the proposal in the bill for up to five ESCs to develop an innovative way to provide pupil transportation to those students who may be difficult to transport efficiently such as those attending chartered non-public schools.

The difficulty for districts with transporting these students may be due to small numbers going to one school building, the school being located outside the school district attendance boundaries, differences in bell schedules between the district and the school, and other challenging circumstances that occur on a case-by-case basis. These factors are exacerbated by the current labor shortages in which bus drivers are difficult to find.

We at the Montgomery County ESC have been searching for alternative ways to assist school districts on a more regional basis with their transportation challenges. We have explored various options, and as a result, we have come to understand the need for assistance from the state in providing seed money to cover start-up costs. We approached Representative Andrea White from our region who sponsored the amendment to HB 33.

The following describes the provision in the substitute bill:

- **Purpose:** To explore innovative regional transportation solutions to assist in getting public school district, public community school, STEM, and chartered non-public school students to school consistently and efficiently. Each pilot will focus on solving the transportation challenges school districts currently face in transporting all students regardless of which school they attend. Where possible, the pilots will take a regional approach.
- **Scope:** Up to five pilot pupil transportation programs that are collaboratively co-designed by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the network of Educational Service Centers (ESCs) through the use of the already established Ohio ESC Association Program Cabinet, which consists of ODE, OESCA, and ESC representatives. ESCs will be able to operate these pupil transportation pilots notwithstanding the provisions contained within ORC 3314.46 for the purposes of transportation.
- **Funding request:** \$10 million over the biennium; reallocated GEERS funds not spent (\$50 million)
- **Outcomes:** An evaluation report will be submitted for review at the end of each pilot, with collective recommendations made by the ESCs/ODE for the future sustainability of each

innovative solution. Also included will be the impact of the program which could include data points on increased attendance, the financial impact on the district/school, and any other co-designed metrics designated.

The Ohio ESC Association Program Cabinet referenced above has been utilized for a number of initiatives where ESCs are tasked with carrying out education services on behalf of the state. Rather than directives coming from ODE to ESCs without input from the field, we have developed this collaborative group to talk through each initiative beforehand. The program cabinet would be responsible for designing the (up to) five pilot pupil transportation programs in cooperation with the participating ESCs.

The Montgomery County ESC is very interested in becoming one of the five pilot programs. Prior to proposing this amendment to Representative White, we worked with the Ohio Educational Service Center Association to be sure the language would be welcomed by other ESCs.

As you can see from the initial request, we asked for \$10 million over the biennium. While we are appreciative that the House included the amendment, we were disappointed to see a \$1 million appropriation amount.

We urge the Senate to retain the provision in the bill establishing the pilot programs, and to increase the appropriation amount to the requested \$10 million over the biennium in order for the ESCs interested in this venture to be successful.

This concludes my testimony. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions. You may also contact our legislative liaison, Barbara Shaner, at 614-325-9562; Barbara.shaner@hcesc.org

Respectfully submitted,

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