



Good afternoon, Chair Brenner and members of the Education Committee.

I'm pleased to be here today representing my home district, Logan-Hocking Local Schools and the Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools.

I am here to ask that you please consider passage of Senate Bill 168, and specifically the changes to licensure and teacher evaluations, which will have a positive impact on school districts' ability to ensure they are meeting the specific educational needs of their community's students.

Importantly, the bill is permissive in that it allows districts to choose to utilize the current state-based evaluation framework if it works for their district, but also provides the flexibility for local boards of education and district administration to adopt a local framework as an alternative to the state one.

In addition, the proposal for district-decided teacher evaluations is on par with the privileges afforded to our counterparts in Ohio's education system – including the private Permanent Non-Tax Certificate and career technical CTC36 license. In both circumstances, the district's superintendent can sign off on a teacher's qualifications, regardless of state testing or certification requirements. During an educator shortage of historic proportions, public school districts are simply asking for the same grace.

Furthermore, many districts have community members with master's degrees in specialized areas, but those individuals are unable to fill gaps in the classroom because they lack official licensure. Some of our schools have to employ individuals retaking state licensure tests as permanent substitutes, but do not have the authority to sign off on their qualifications and make them full-time teachers until the test is passed.

In Appalachia, much of our localized workforce obtains higher education in bordering states. The bureaucratic systems in place to transfer out-of-state licensure took a colleague from April to August 2023 to complete for one employee, due to disputes about the specific wording from the employee's university's letter of eligibility and electronic versus physical signatures. Localized control over these processes would have saved this district five months of uncertainty and afforded that teacher five months of classroom preparation.

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Regarding the teacher evaluation process, which I have shared with my peers in neighboring districts throughout Appalachia, I find a familiar concern. We need to be able to evaluate our educators based on the specific building, district and community strengths and challenges rather than having a cookie-cutter approach. Additionally, administrators are currently required to complete unnecessary online documentation for this process, which is having no positive effect on our teacher development or student outcomes.

Empowering districts to develop and utilize a framework that more closely matches the specific professional development needs within that specific district only makes good sense – for students, teachers, administrators, local communities and the state as a whole.

Doesn't it make sense that teachers in Logan, Ohio, would have different professional development needs and goals than those in Upper Arlington or Columbus Public Schools? Doesn't it make sense that teacher evaluations would match with those needs and goals, versus being forced through a process that isn't helping make them better educators? Doesn't it make sense that if soft skills like problem-solving and critical thinking are needed in specific school buildings that teachers would be held accountable for incorporating those needs into their instruction? Doesn't it make sense to eliminate unnecessary and unhelpful red tape and documentation to allow administrators to levy productive, fruitful evaluations for their teachers that will help them improve student achievement?

It makes good sense to me – and I hope it does to you as well. I encourage your support for Senate Bill 168 and your support for local school districts' ability to provide an outstanding, high-quality education for the young people of our state.

Thank you.