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State Senator Catherine D. Ingram

9th Senate District
135th General Assembly

Sponsor Testimony – Senate Bill 219, Education Committee April 16, 2024

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brian, and esteemed members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 219. The legislation will restore the grade bands that were in place prior to the passage of H.B.33.

In 2018, the "Enact Public School Deregulation Act-primary/secondary ed-testing" aimed to grant more autonomy to local education authorities. Originally, the bill proposed consolidating general education licensure bands to Grades 1-8 and 7-12, departing from Ohio's existing bands: PK-3, 4-9, and 7-12. SB 216 also sought to transfer teacher licensure bands from the Ohio Administrative Code to the Revised Code, subjecting future changes to legislative approval. However, concerns from higher education institutions and teachers emerged, highlighting the loss of focus on early childhood education and neglect of middle-level learner needs.

To address these concerns, a compromise was reached: PK-Grade 5, Grades 4-9, and Grades 7-12 licensure bands, allowing authorized superintendents to temporarily assign teachers to classrooms one grade level above or below their licensure band for up to three years without additional requirements. This compromise received substantial support from PK-12 partners, leading to its approval by Ohio's legislative bodies and Governor John Kasich in August 2018.

H.B. 33 did away with the collaborative efforts that took place in 2018. While the consolidation of grade bands may appear to streamline licensure processes, it raises substantial concerns regarding the quality of teacher preparation and subsequent student learning outcomes.

The merger of PK-5 and 4-9 into a broad PK-8 license risks diluting the specialized preparation that educators receive for distinct age groups. This tailored preparation, encompassing aspects such as child development and instructional strategies, is crucial for effective teaching. Deviating from this tailored approach could result in a shallower depth of content knowledge and less effective pedagogical strategies, ultimately compromising student learning experiences.

Moreover, educators' commitment to teaching specific grade levels, particularly middle-grade students, varies widely. The transition to PK-8 may exacerbate existing teacher shortages, particularly in the critical middle grades. This lack of dedicated preparation for teaching middle-grade students has long been a concern, and it is vital to prioritize the recruitment and retention of teachers specifically trained to work with adolescent populations.

Implementing such a change will pose significant challenges, requiring extensive time and resources to develop and adopt new pedagogical standards, modify existing programs, and validate new licensure tests. Rushing this process could lead to unintended consequences and further strain an already burdened education system.

Furthermore, the proposed shift may not effectively address the root causes of teacher shortages and retention issues. Rather than solely restructuring grade bands, it is essential to prioritize addressing the multifaceted barriers to becoming and remaining a teacher. By providing comprehensive support and addressing concerns raised in previous education hearings, we can enact meaningful change that addresses the underlying issues affecting our education system.

Our teachers, students, and families have demonstrated remarkable resilience, innovation, and adaptability in the face of change. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential detrimental effects of constant change on educators. We owe it to our teachers to provide stable support as we continue to recover from the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I am available to address any questions you may have at this time.