

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Izetta Thomas. I am a 2nd generation 20-year veteran educator in Columbus City Schools, and a proud 3rd generation graduate of Columbus Public Schools. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 295.

School transformation deserves to be at the top of everyone's agenda, but school closings don't transform anything. In fact, school closing decisions without proper shared decision-making & plans with the school communities cause detriment to our neighborhoods and school communities. Senate Bill 295 would not only remove local control from elected school board members and parents, it would also remove family rights to choose their child's schools, and perpetuate segregation in the following ways:

- Ohio is one of the top 20 states with the most segregated schools. Closing schools can affect Black and brown students disproportionately, which perpetuates the systemic racism that already exists in the Ohio education system.
- Our rural school districts in Ohio, who generally rank lower than urban schools, will be at risk for reduced educational access. Students in our rural areas may have to travel longer distances to attend school in another town, making it harder to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities, and negatively impact their academic performance.
- Neighborhood schools are the heart of our communities and act as community hubs. Closing or reconstituting our schools is a slap in the face to our students, families and staff. Replacing a majority of the staff has been proven to fail over and over again in districts like Columbus and others in Ohio. Doing so does more than break contractual agreements, it breaks the heart and trust of school communities.
- Pushing public schools into private or charters decreases student access to free and appropriate public education, special education services, and highly qualified educators who care about their students and school community.

Senate Bill 295 is harmful for Ohio students. It would serve as a catalyst to dismantling public education, redlining neighborhoods, decreasing property values, and increasing predatory takeovers by for-profit entities who don't even have the decency to reside in our state.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Izetta Thomas
Education Justice Organizer
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