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***Re: Testimony on H.B. No. 96***

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Education Committee—

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Todd Schmid, and I am the Vice President of Sales with the school safety company, Gaggle.

At Gaggle, we provide digital safety management, therapy, web filtering and a 24-hour crisis line. Today, I would like to focus my discussion on safety management. Gaggle Safety Management works on district-owned accounts and devices. We identify concerning content, including suicidal ideation, self-harm, bullying, child trafficking, child pornography, and firearms. When discovered, this content is flagged and reviewed by our expert team that categorizes and determines the level of urgency based on the content and context. In urgent situations district-determined contacts are immediately notified to intervene and they save lives. Safety Management is a preventative measure that helps districts and schools prevent tragedies before they occur.

Our annual National Student Safety Report findings reveal a troubling rise in self-harm, suicide, and violent incidents across K-12 students, with an alarming increase among elementary-aged children. The data reveal a stark reality: incidents of suicide and self-harm have risen by 10% over the past year alone and have more than doubled in the past five years. Suicide is now tragically the leading cause of death for children ages 10-14, and as such, schools face a heightened responsibility to protect their students.

During the 2023-2024 school year, our Safety Team identified 484 suicide notes, marking a 76% increase among elementary students alone. The report also notes an overall 30% increase in incidents of self-harm and suicide involving elementary students. These numbers signal the importance of early monitoring and rapid response.

Additional findings show that one-third of students involved in critical self-harm incidents had previously engaged in concerning online behavior. This rate increases to 35% among high school students, indicating how behavioral patterns provide insight into potential future mental health crises.

Gaggle safety management currently protects about 210,000 students in 38 schools throughout Ohio. In the past three years, we have helped save 154 student lives from over 13,000 emergency alerts related to suicide or self-harm in your state.

Unfortunately, not all districts in Ohio have sustainable funding to provide this kind of intervention and life-saving service. By sequestering this funding for safety management, you could help save more student lives, keep families whole, and ensure student safety and well-being. This is why we humbly request your support for sequestered funding for safety management in this budget cycle. Thank you for your time.