



Interested Party Testimony – HB 96

Senate Education Committee

May 6, 2025

Presented by: Karen Leith, PhD, Advocacy Chair, LWVO State Board

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, my name is Karen Leith, Ph.D. As Chair of our LWVO Advocacy Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to share on behalf of the LWVO, our official stand on having an elected State Board of Education.

League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that works to not only ensure that every voter has a chance to vote, but also that every voter is engaged in the process of governance. The voice of every citizen is especially important in how we educate our children. While most decisions belong with the local control of the district school board, there are issues that need to be determined at the state level. **Therefore, League of Women Voters supports an elected State Board of Education.**

In 1953 the LWVO supported a Constitutional Amendment that created an elected state board of education to set education policy for the state's public school system. Elected members shield the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the agency from political interference. The amendment stabilized leadership, preserved public education as a nonpartisan public resource, and made the agency accountable to the public. **In 1956, the first 11-member elected state board of education took control, and preserved the public voice and the common good.**

Since then, partisan interests have used the state budget to dilute the independence of the state board and muffle the citizen voice in setting policy. The first step was to add 8 Governor appointed members. In 2023 lawmakers used the budget to reduce the board's responsibility to teacher licensure and discipline, and land transfers, and created a new cabinet level agency, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. The governor now appoints the director.

HB 96, if approved, is the death knell to public education as a nonpartisan and nonpolitical function of state government. It silences the public voice in setting policy, and ends policy maker accountability to the public, leaving critical decisions about teaching standards and quality in the hands of 5 appointed members, only three of whom are expected to be knowledgeable and committed to public education and the common good.

LWVO is committed to public education as a shared public project that values every person, strengthens democracy, and unites communities in support of the development of all their children, the future contributors to their community. Current political forces are focused on privatizing education and rejecting the common good and its emphasis on what we have in common and what we owe to each other. This movement to make public education a partisan matter puts at risk education's essential democratic purpose.

The common good is best protected through a nonpartisan elected governing board and an independent public agency, and must not be compromised by policymaking that is easily susceptible to partisan goals facilitated by unaccountable partisan appointees.

LWVO calls on the Ohio Senate to reject the inclusion in the budget of policy that makes the State Board of Education appointed. It should be an all elected board allowing for the voices of the people of Ohio to be heard.