Michele Reynolds

Ohio Senate 3rd District

Sponsor Testimony on Senate Bill 290

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 290.

Across our nation, the rise in active shooter and violent events in schools has revealed critical gaps in school safety. One of the tragic lessons from the Uvalde Texas school shooting was that law enforcement lacked the keys needed to quickly access the building which delayed their response and cost precious time. After entering the school, it took 77 minutes for police to access the area where the shooter was located. They had to break down several doors, but the delay proved deadly, and the school was left to cover the repair costs. 19 children and 2 teachers were killed in that shooting.

To prevent further fatalities, senate bill 290 would grant standardized school access to first responders through a lock box system. It requires all public and chartered nonpublic schools to install an exterior secure master key box on each school building by June 30, 2027. This timeline gives districts ample time to budget or apply for funding through the School Safety Grant. Each key box must meet the national testing standards for gun safes and key safes to prevent tampering. These recommendations align with the U.S. Department of Justice's report on the Uvalde tragedy.

Senate Bill 290 is not an unfunded mandate. Each school district may apply for a School Safety Training Grant to cover the cost of purchasing and installing the boxes. House Bill 96 appropriated $10 million in both fiscal years 2026 and 2027 specifically for this purpose.

Six states have already enacted similar legislation, and several others are considering it. By passing Senate Bill 290, Ohio will take a proactive step in ensuring our schools are secure and our law enforcement officers are equipped to respond swiftly and effectively.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.