

Ohio Senate Finance Committee

House Bill 96

June 4, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson; and esteemed members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, my name is Rhonda Johnson; and I am here today to respectfully express my opposition to the proposed change to the composition of the State Board of Education, as included in House Bill 96.

I am honored to serve as a newly-elected member of the State Board of Education, and I believe the proposed reduction of the board to five governor-appointed members would be a significant detriment to the education ecosystem of our state.

The current Board, composed of 11 elected members and 8 members appointed by the Governor, is not only functioning effectively but thriving collegially. Members bring a balance of statewide vision with a grassroots understanding, fostering a unique synergy that directly contributes to our effectiveness.

Since the responsibilities of the board were redefined in the 2023-24 budget bill, we have been laser-focused on critical issues that directly impact the quality of education for Ohio's students. Our work has centered on ensuring that students are taught and supported by high-quality, competent, and caring educators – a direct result of our dedicated efforts in educator licensure, professional standards and conduct. The professional staff under the leadership of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has worked tirelessly to improve the efficiency in processing educator licenses, which directly impacts educator supply. The board rigorously reviews professional conduct cases to uphold the integrity of the profession. This focus, enabled by the current board's diverse expertise and direct community ties, ensures accountability and responsiveness to the needs of Ohio's diverse student population, from our largest urban centers to our most rural districts.

I am particularly proud to serve alongside elected board members who act as vital education ambassadors in their respective districts. They are invaluable resources to citizens and education groups, providing essential guidance on pressing issues such as navigating teacher shortages, understanding license reciprocity for educators moving to Ohio, and contributing to the continuous development of educator standards. These elected members regularly engage with parents, superintendents, teachers, and community leaders, bringing their concerns and insights directly to the board table. Their direct connection to their communities provides a crucial, democratically accountable perspective that appointed members, no matter how well-intentioned, cannot fully replicate or replace. This local voice is indispensable for crafting policies and processes that truly resonate with the diverse needs and challenges faced by

schools across Ohio. Elected members are directly answerable to the voters they serve, ensuring continuous feedback loops and immediate responsiveness to local educational needs.

The collective wisdom from 295 years of education experience on the board includes my own 41 years as a respected and trusted voice in education. My journey in Columbus from the classroom to union leadership and then to city-level education administration has provided me with a comprehensive view of the educational ecosystem, from the daily realities of teaching to the complexities of policy implementation and community engagement. This type of extensive, on-the-ground experience, particularly from elected members, is precisely what ensures the board remains grounded in the realities of Ohio's classrooms and communities, enabling us to make informed decisions that consider the practical implications for students, teachers, and families.

The State Board of Education is currently working precisely as it was designed to function under the 2023-24 budget bill. The changes enacted then were substantial, and the board has diligently adapted and focused its efforts. We have made significant progress in stabilizing and focusing our efforts on core responsibilities, and our current momentum is strong. Altering the board's composition would disrupt this progress, lead to a loss of valuable institutional knowledge, and undermine the stability necessary for effective planning and partnership opportunities with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and other public and private entities.

Therefore, I implore this committee to *remove* the proposed change to the State Board of Education from House Bill 96. This is not merely a procedural request; it is a call for democratic accountability and transparency in decisions that will profoundly impact generations of Ohio students and educators.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Johnson

State Board of Education, District 7