

Testimony before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Michelle Newman, and I served as an elected member of the State Board of Education from 2021 to 2024, representing communities across central, southeastern and Appalachian Ohio.

I'm here to express deep concern about the proposal to eliminate elected members from the board—effectively ending public representation in one of the few remaining state-level education bodies where citizens still have a voice.

Yes, in 2023, the legislature reassigned many key education policy functions from the board to the newly formed Department of Education and Workforce. That shift was significant. But the board's remaining duties are far from ceremonial.

The State Board of Education still oversees:

- Teacher licensure and disciplinary actions
- Territory transfer decisions between school districts
- Rulemaking for professional standards
- Oversight of the Ohio Educator Standards Board
- And it remains a rare statewide forum where public education concerns can still be raised by and with the public.

These responsibilities may seem technical, but they shape the day-to-day experiences of educators, students, and families across Ohio.

During my time on the board, I saw firsthand how critical it is for families to have an accessible, accountable representative—especially when it comes to teacher licensure. When the state proposed

consolidating intervention specialist licenses, a parent in Meigs County reached out to me, worried her daughter would lose access to the instructional strategies that were helping her thrive. Even though the policy process has since shifted to the Department of Education and Workforce, the State Board still plays a role in how licensure changes are implemented and understood in local schools. That parent didn't know how to navigate the new system—but she knew she could contact me. I brought her concerns forward and helped make sure her voice was part of the conversation.

That kind of access matters. Throughout my time on the board, I consistently traveled to districts, met with stakeholders and responded to constituent contacts—emails, calls, and outreach from parents, educators, and community members who needed clarity, support, or a voice at the state level. The elected members serving today continue that work. That level of responsiveness is a key part of being elected and accountable to the public. Appointed members, by contrast, are not expected to maintain that same connection or direct communication with the communities we serve.

Ohio is a large and diverse state. Families in Jackson, Morgan, and Perry counties don't always see themselves reflected in centralized policymaking. Elected board members ensure that all communities—rural, urban, and suburban—have someone who is both informed and accountable.

Removing these seats removes that voice. And it sends a dangerous message: that the public no longer deserves a say in how public education is administered.

I urge you: preserve the elected seats on the State Board. Keep this institution accountable. Keep it accessible. And keep it democratic.

Thank you for your time—and for your commitment to all of Ohio's children.