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Senator Catherine D. Ingram

9th Senate District

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 168. This bill would require the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission to establish guidelines for assisting school district boards of education in the acquisition of classroom facilities for a preschool program.

Ohio funds the construction of K-12 school facilities through the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC), including preschool facilities as part of district master plans, but only for those districts participating in the Classroom Facilities Assistance Program (CFAP). This program provides funding for districts going through the CFAP, ensuring that preschool classrooms are built alongside other K-12 facilities. However, once a district has already participated in CFAP and wishes to build a preschool facility, there is no available funding or program to support these needs.

The proposed legislation aims to address this gap by creating a funding mechanism through the OFCC to assist districts with acquiring preschool facilities, even after they've completed CFAP or if they are not part of the program. This would allow all districts, including those that have already utilized CFAP, to build or acquire the necessary classrooms to support preschool programs, which are critical for early childhood education.

In this bill, a district board would submit a written proposal, in the form and manner prescribed by the commission, indicating the total amount of funding requested and the amount of matching funds pledged, which shall be at least equal to the requested amount. If the commission determines that the proposal meets its established guidelines, it will enter into an agreement with the district board and encumber the approved funds from appropriations for classroom facilities assistance projects. The agreement would also specify the ownership of the classroom facilities in the event the preschool program permanently closes.

This legislation will ensure that all children in Ohio have access to quality preschool education in safe and well-equipped facilities, regardless of a district's participation in CFAP.

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking-Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you again for this opportunity. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.