



**House Finance Committee
Testimony on HB 64
Presented by Darold Johnson, Legislative Director
Ohio Federation of Teachers
April 17, 2015**

Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Driehaus, I am Darold Johnson, Legislative Director for the Ohio Federation of Teachers. OFT represents 20,000 members who are teachers, paraprofessionals and nurses in Ohio's public schools, high education faculty, and public employees who provide vital services to families and communities across our state. On behalf of our members and the children and families they serve, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about this legislation.

We want focus on the key elements we feel need to be amended.

Charter schools

OFT opposes the provision that would exempt charter school teachers from participating in STRS or SERS. OFT strongly believes in retirement stability. Our members often change employers, including moving from traditional schools to charters and back again as job opportunities permit. Any breaks in their years of service would negatively impact their pension as it is determined by the years of service requirement. Retirement stability greatly benefits the state Ohio. Retirees contribute billions of dollars to the Ohio economy every year, this is especially beneficial during a recession or simply touch economic times as we have seen in recent years.

One provision that fits well in the budget is language regarding transportation of charter school students. Traditional schools must not be required to transport charter students who live within a half-mile of a charter, especially since traditional schools don't provide their own students the same level of service. HB 64 language can resolve this inequity.

Higher education

We urge you to remove the language that prohibits higher education faculty from participating in a union. In 2011, 2.2 million voters rejected this language. Collective bargaining rights have provided faculty members an opportunity to have a say about their working conditions and speak out on behalf of students - that right should not be eliminated.

Ed Choice Scholarship vouchers

We oppose expansion of the Cleveland voucher program and increasing the voucher amount for high school. Ohio has too many voucher programs as it is despite the fact that data shows little difference between the performance of voucher students and their peers who remain in traditional public schools. Vouchers are costly to taxpayers in light of this data. AFT conducted a poll last year and results show that parents prefer the state focus on providing excellence in all public schools, not choice. All voucher programs - except the income-based voucher - drain resources from traditional public schools. Ohio already provides funding to private schools for auxiliary services. There is no public demand for vouchers, yet Ohio's traditional public schools have a great need for additional funding.

High performing school districts

We feel that the provisions associated with these districts and high performing teachers could be applied to all schools for third grade reading, professional development and course work. We oppose any hiring of non-licensed staff because the state now has an alternative licensing method for non-traditional teachers.

Early Childhood Education

We applaud the governor's desire to increase the participation of 4-year-olds in early childhood programs. We have concerns about how effective it will be as a partial-day program. This expansion is a start, but there needs to be more discussion about how this will work and whether the effort should be increased. We support reaching more children because the data is clear that children who begin their learning early perform better academically and have a greater social and economic impact on society throughout their lifetime.

Health Care Services for Students

We have concerns about the language used in the budget that allows school districts to contract out for health services. The language is vague and lowers the quality of care and expertise needed to serve as a school nurse. School nurses have advanced certification in a master's degree or equivalent. RNs need to be supervised by a doctor. School nurses do not as they are certified to work independently. School nurses need to know how to write 504s and IEPs for students with special needs. Those with other nursing licenses are not skilled in this area. Akron City Schools contracted with Akron Children's Hospital and arranged for the hospital's nurses who would provide services in schools to apply for their school nurse licenses. This can be and should be required.

Chairman Smith, this concludes my testimony. I will answer any questions. I appreciate your attention.