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Chairman Oelslager and members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Dr. Richard J. Varrati, CEO of Quaker Digital Academy which is sponsored by New Philadelphia City Schools, and I want to thank you for taking the time to read my concerns over the Sponsor Evaluation system.

Quaker Digital Academy (QDA) is an online dropout prevention conversion school that serves grades K through 12 throughout Ohio. We are proud of the work we do with our students and families. QDA has Exceeded or Met Standards on the Ohio Report Card and has graduated over 678 students since 2004.

Our Sponsor, New Philadelphia City Schools, and Quaker Digital Academy believe in accountability. However in saying that, for any accountability system to be effective, it must be fairly implemented and flexible.

We felt that the rollout of the new sponsor accountability system by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) into the 2016-17 school year was unfair. We did not receive the Sponsor Evaluation Rubrics until near the end of the school year. It was an enormous task. With no prior training or explanation from ODE, we literally had to develop teams to take rubric areas to gather data in a short time frame. Personnel were reassigned and hired to help with gathering and putting data together. We had several binders of material that was gathered and collated. We found flaws in the process as the rubric required items from the beginning of the school year that we were not aware of the requirements in August. The rubric, upon reviewing it with our peers, does not align with Ohio Revised Code. Our sponsor had not been informed of the changes in requirements by ODE. In addition, there were changes to the Quality Practice Rubric. This makes it extremely difficult in meeting requirements when the expectations change overnight. We would not prepare a student to take a test on George Washington and then the day before the test change the topic. It is poor education to say the least. We want to be compliant with the law, and we believe in accountability, but it needs to be fair to all.

The late notification to the sponsors and changes in rubrics made it nearly impossible to comply and receive an "Effective" rating. In addition, upon reviewing our scores we found several errors in the report and contacted ODE. We were informed that there was no appeal process. In my 38 years of education, I have never ran into a situation that you could not correct an error or have the right of appeal.

We are requesting your assistance in correcting a flawed Sponsor Evaluation system to help our Sponsors and Schools. Please consider the following:

1. Establish an Appeal Process
2. Advance notification and training on the evaluation rubric
3. Simplify the scoring rubric
4. Provide Safe Harbor for all Sponsors for 2016-17 school year

Quaker Digital Academy and our sponsor, New Philadelphia City Schools, are committed to providing a quality education to the students we serve and want to thank you for your commitment to education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard J. Varrati", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Richard J. Varrati