



Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Ohio House Primary & Secondary Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to this very important committee. My name is Jeanne Melvin, and I am a retired school teacher and president of *Public Education Partners*, a statewide advocacy group for public school districts and the children and families that they serve.

The Board of *Public Education Partners* (PEP) continues to be adamantly opposed to Ohio's school takeover law - House Bill 70. Ohioans have never agreed to any initiative to give the state authority to take over struggling public school districts. In fact, an overwhelming majority of the public believes that disinvestment in schools, which our state has authorized over the last eight years, is a primary obstacle to a high-quality public education.

As you must know, HB 70 was originally designed to encourage wraparound community learning centers in lower performing high-poverty schools to bring in health clinics, after-school programs, and parent support programs. The bill easily passed the House and Senate, but an unanticipated 66-page amendment was introduced to establish a state takeover of the Youngstown schools and future takeovers of other school districts with lower test scores. Without a public hearing, the hijacked bill passed the Senate and the House and was sent to the Governor and signed into law.

House Bill 70 is undemocratic, unaccountable, and unacceptable. It's undemocratic, because it mandates the appointment of school district CEOs with the power to override the decisions of locally elected school boards. The law is unaccountable, because it gives an autocratic appointed CEO total control over every facet of the system. HB 70 is unacceptable, because it disrupts the school districts with some of the highest concentrations of low-income and minority students in the state.

There is a better way than school takeovers.

Research and analysis of successful school reform efforts have pointed to several supports that are consistently associated with stronger student outcomes. These include access to high quality early childhood and pre-K programs, a learning environment centered on students, positive and restorative discipline practices, and investment in public school districts, not constant budget cut backs and efforts to educate students on the cheap. Ohio needs to invest in wraparound supports like health services, vision and dental care, after-school sports leagues and more, for both students and the broader community.

The PEP Board commends Representatives Smith, Hambley, Miller, and Jones on the hard work they put into crafting their bills to solve this school takeover crisis. The board understands the logic of proceeding slowly and methodically by first establishing a moratorium on the creation of new Academic Distress Commissions (HB 127), but Youngstown, Lorain, and East Cleveland School Districts are in dire straits and require the more immediate action detailed in HB 154.

PEP supports the complete and immediate repeal of HB 70, as well as replacement of the policy with an evidence-based turnaround model that restores local control and improves student outcomes. High-quality opportunities for all students require additional resources, including better access to health and social services, early childhood education, and academic enrichment programs, which are the cornerstone of improved outcomes for Ohio's children.

Thank you again for allowing me to offer written testimony on behalf of the Board of *Public Education Partners* and more importantly, in support of Ohio's children and their families.

Jeanne Melvin, President, *Public Education Partners*

