

Testimony for April 30th Committee Hearing

My name is Michael Stomps and this is my colleague, Vicky Shillington; we are both from IPERC, a non-profit international education organization based here in Columbus, OH. IPERC works in collaboration with the Center for China-U.S. Education Research and Exchange (CUEE) at The Ohio State University to promote cross-cultural exchange between students and educators from the US and China. Some of our educational programs include:

- Building sister school relationships between US/Chinese schools (whereby students can interact with their peers from across the world to collaborate on STEM-focused projects, participate in penpal programs, and gain new perspectives as they work together to reach goals).
- Organizing cultural immersion trips to China for both students and educators (where they will have the opportunity to meet with fellow educators/students, compare and contrast US & Chinese education methods, and build new partnerships and friendships with their colleagues in China).
- Finally, we help international students enhance their education by placing them in Ohio schools on the F-1 international student visa program (where their goal is to excel academically, receive their high school diploma, and eventually enroll at a highly-esteemed US College/University).

Every day, Vicky and I work with many international students in order to guide them through the application and enrollment process at schools from across Ohio. As IPERC's Program Director, I work on developing, maintaining and building relationships with schools across the US. Additionally, I am responsible managing the applications for our international students and coordinating the dialogue between students, administrators, and our colleagues in the US and China. To help illustrate why I believe passing HB 23 would be extremely beneficial for our state, I wanted to take moment to briefly explain the process an international student has to go through in order to attend a US high school:

1. Once the student has done their research and decides where they would like to apply, work begins on submitting the student's translated academic records to their chosen schools, scheduling an online interview, and submitting all the required medical, financial, and immigration documents to the school.
2. After a final review of the application and interview, the student will receive an official decision letter. If they are offered admission and choose to enroll, the school will issue an I-20 form that will be mailed to the student. Once the student receives the I-20 in the mail, he/she will bring this form to the US Embassy in order to undergo a visa interview.
3. Assuming the student has passed the visa interview and all of their submitted paperwork is verified, they will be issued an F-1 student visa and will be permitted to enroll at a US school in the upcoming academic year.

To go over some additional details regarding this process and to explain why passing HB 23 is so important, I am going to have my colleague, Vicky Shillington, continue from here.

Hello everyone, my name is Vicky Shillington, and I am the Vice President of Operations for IPERC. In addition to working with our international student applicants, I also coordinate various global immersion opportunities for our partner schools including our sister school program, short-term exchanges, and trips to China for both educators and students. In my years of experience helping students navigate through the complex US visa system and school application process, I have seen firsthand that academic enrichment is the #1 focus of both students and parents when they decide to attend school in the US. In total, there are only 747 F-1 international students in Ohio, about 120 of those are represented by IPERC. IPERC's international students are almost exclusively from China (the largest market for international education), where the culture places a heavy importance on academic achievement. In fact, in all my experiences working with hundreds of applicants per year, most questions from students and parents are centered on academics; extracurriculars like sports are secondary.

However, although our students make the journey to the US primarily for the academic opportunities, an important part of becoming a well-rounded high school student is socializing with fellow classmates and interacting outside the classroom; by preventing our international students from participating in sports, we are taking away from them a key part of the high school experience. At the same time, international students are often charged even higher tuition and thousands of dollars in extra fees in order to attend the same schools as their US classmates. Why should we prevent them from participating in athletics when they pay just as much, if not more, to attend the same school? In essence, the only thing we want for our students are the same opportunities offered to everyone else. They should have the opportunity to fully participate in their school community, whether it be after-school clubs, student government, or (in this specific case) high school sports. Please support HB 23 in order to ensure that international students can participate in athletics alongside their friends from the US. Thank you.