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Senate Education Committee House Bill 166 Testimony on Academic Distress Commissions

Lisa Gray, Ohio Excels
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Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 166. My name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels.

Ohio Excels is a new business coalition focused on helping to improve the educational outcomes for all Ohio students. Our focus on education includes early childhood, K-12 and post-secondary education experiences. And, as part of that, we are committed to working with the broader business community, policymakers, educators and other community leaders to support our students, educators and schools.

Helping turnaround our lowest-performing schools and districts is one of the biggest challenges policymakers face in education. Ohio's model of Academic Distress Commissions (ADCs) has been around for many years, and it has not yielded the results policymakers and the public were hoping to achieve on behalf of our students.

The House amended House Bill 154 into the budget bill. **Ohio Excels opposes that amendment.** We believe it would institute a weakened model of school improvement with little oversight. The children in these schools deserve the best schools we can provide, and we are not confident this approach will improve student outcomes.

While Ohio Excels does not have a specific proposal for ADC improvement, we do believe that any policy meant to address Academic Distress Commissions and low-performing school districts should follow these design principles:

- The state should do more to **identify low-performing school districts that are trending downward** and provide additional supports and interventions before districts reach the lowest levels of performance. These supports should include an independent **root cause analysis and review and outside turnaround partners.**

- Business, philanthropic and other community leaders need to be included as **key partners** in helping chronically low-performing school districts **develop and implement** improvement plans.
- There should be **more mayoral involvement** in the leadership of districts identified as chronically low-performing to help improve public accountability and better activate community engagement and support.
- While the state and local community should support the district as a whole, the majority of the turnaround **efforts should focus on the lowest-performing schools** in the district.
- There should ultimately be a **final consequence** for chronically low-performing school districts that do not improve over time, such as state takeover. However, there should be additional options available for chronically low-performing school districts to forestall this consequence, such as partnering with third-party providers, adopting proven intervention strategies, collaborating with local, high-quality charter schools, and other turnaround strategies.

This is challenging work. Ohio Excels is ready to work with committee members on further defining a comprehensive and long-term district improvement solution on behalf of Ohio's students and families. Thank you.