



**State Representative Joe Miller  
House District 56**

**Senate Education Committee Testimony  
May 29, 2019**

Chairman Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak about House Bill 166. As passed by the House, the budget bill includes language from HB 154, legislation I sponsored that addresses the Academic Distress Commission issue. The included language would end state takeovers, restore local control over the school turnaround process, and provide a framework for struggling buildings to utilize state expertise and forge their own path to success. I respectfully urge members of this committee to support its inclusion in the Senate version of the budget.

Our discussion of HB 154 has to start with the story of HB 70, which devised the top-down, state-controlled model we have today. In 2015, HB 70 started out as a bipartisan bill that built on the success of Community Learning Centers, or CLCs. In places like Cincinnati, CLCs have demonstrated value in helping buildings and districts address their unique challenges by embedding badly-needed health and social services directly in school buildings.

HB 70 went from a bill with widespread support to an extremely divisive piece of legislation that has had far-reaching implications for children, teachers, parents and school districts across the state. The 'new' HB 70, which ballooned from 10 pages to 77, shifted the focus well beyond wraparound services to a complete reimagining of the state's model for turning around districts that had fallen under 'Academic Distress' based on their district report card.

Previously in an advisory role, these State-controlled Academic Distress Commissions (ADCs), which already existed in places like Lorain and Youngstown, were given new authority to appoint a district CEO. In HB 70's own words, the CEO was given "complete operational, managerial, and instructional control" of the district. And if you can believe it, the powers of the ADCs and CEO actually expanded over time. Local stakeholders were stripped of any meaningful input, oversight, or power, and left with only the ability to put a levy on the ballot.

On June 24th 2015, in one single day, these radical new elements were amended into HB 70, it was reported out of the Senate education committee, passed by the Senate, and then passed by the House. Reasonable people can disagree over the merits of the bill; but I think we can all agree that the process it underwent is not what we think of when we imagine how good public policy is created.

You have to wonder if it's any surprise, then, that we've ended up where we are. An undemocratic process, empowering unaccountable district CEOs leading to unacceptable outcomes for our communities. In Lorain, I have heard from every level-- parents, teachers, administrators, and even students-- about this issue. Underpinning all their stories is a fundamental disconnect between the state-imposed administration and everyone else who makes up the community they're ostensibly trying to serve.

This feedback informs the central tenet of our bill, HB 154. Simply stated, HB 154 restores community ownership over the quality of schools in their neighborhood. Local buy-in is an essential component of school improvement. What we've seen in Lorain and Youngstown is that when you don't provide a meaningful way for residents and stakeholders to have their voice heard, be part of the turnaround process, and have skin in the game - the likelihood for success is slim to none.

HB 154 has two major components. The first piece is moving our state beyond the ADC/CEO model that simply hasn't worked. Places like Lorain and Youngstown need a fresh start. I can tell you in Lorain, the constant barrage of dysfunction, last-minute changes and infighting have worn people down. They need a moment to regroup, turn the page and shift the conversation to what will work, so we can come together and provide our children with the quality education they deserve.

HB 154 lays out a framework for communities to have that very discussion. Our intent was to recognize that everyone has had a different path up to this point, and moving forward will have a different path to success. We also recognize that school districts are not homogenous entities. Needed services in a rural district may not be what is needed in an urban district, and what works in a district's middle school might not make sense for its high school. That's why HB 154 moves away from triggers based on district report cards towards building-based assessment and reform. This change also removes the ability for districts to hide behind a solid overall grade and avoid addressing their low-performing buildings.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.