



Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Minority Member Fedor, and Members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit 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.

The supportive wraparound school version of HB 70 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 Miller and Jones on the thoughtfulness and due diligence they put into crafting House Bill 154 to solve this school takeover crisis. Kudos to the bipartisan group of 83 Ohio House members who passed HB 154 to repeal Ohio's failed school district takeover law and put it into their version of the state budget. We salute the bipartisan State Board of Education whose members unanimously supported a resolution against House Bill 70 and the local school boards across the state that started the ball rolling. Many thanks to all of the parents, educators, and stakeholders who have taken a stand and spoken out against the destruction caused by House Bill 70. HOORAY for the grassroots public education

advocates who have worked relentlessly to educate all Ohioans about school takeovers and what they are *really* about.

HB 70 was originally intended to encourage wraparound community learning centers in lower performing high-poverty schools to bring in health clinics, after-school programs, and parent support programs. It was a wonderful supportive policy for lower-income students and their families until a covert group hijacked it and changed it into a school takeover law.

HB 154, another policy offering support for lower performing school districts, was designed to dissolve and replace academic distress commissions and to encourage wraparound services for high-poverty schools. House Bill 154 passed without amendment in the Ohio House of Representatives by a vote of 82-12, and now it's up to the Ohio Senate. Unfortunately, another covert group, which includes some of the same people who turned HB 70 into a school takeover law, has just surfaced with an alternative plan for Academic Distress Commissions – the Ohio School Transformation Plan.

“The group recommends that in the budget, action be taken to incubate a new approach to turning around low performing schools and districts in Ohio... In the budget language for the Senate, the Working Group recommends establishing the Ohio School Transformation Plan. This is to be accomplished through a phased implementation—addressing the needs of districts currently within the Academic Distress Commission in Phase I—and working over the next six months to develop a Phase 2 detailed framework.”

The framers of the Ohio School Transformation Plan describe elevating the work to a higher (state) level. The assumption is that officials of the state, many of whom lack any training and experience in the field of education, know more about operating a local school district than the professional educators chosen by the struggling school district's elected school board.

Make no mistake, the Ohio School Transformation Plan is still a state takeover.

<https://janresseger.wordpress.com/2019/05/27/20052/>

It seems that the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio General Assembly depends too much on school choice organizations, philanthropies, and anti-public education “think-tanks” for advice and direction in education issues. The time has come to finally pay attention to the thoughtful input of thousands of parents, educators, school leaders, community members, and other school stakeholders who have demanded the end of state takeovers of public school districts.

PEP supports the complete and immediate repeal of HB 70 by keeping the HB 154 language in the budget. The Youngstown, Lorain, and East Cleveland School Districts cannot wait for the phased implementation of a questionable plan designed without the input of public school teachers – they require the more immediate action detailed in HB 154.

Thank you again for allowing me to offer 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*

