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OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
Ohio Senate Education Committee
Substitute HB 166/HB 154 Academic Distress Commission Proponent Testimony
May 29, 2019

Good afternoon Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee.

I am Becky Higgins, President of the Ohio Education Association. I am here to testify on behalf of OEA's 122,000 members. OEA strongly supports the Academic Distress Commission (ADC) language from HB 154 that has been included in the state budget (HB 166) that was passed by the House. OEA asks the Ohio Senate to keep the HB 154 language in HB 166. Also, with me is Larry Ellis, the President of the Youngstown Education Association and Jay Pickering, the President of the Lorain Education Association.

The 83-12 vote in Ohio House of Representatives for HB 154 demonstrated overwhelming bi-partisan support for the approach to ADC reform that was taken by the sponsors of HB 154.

As you might imagine, the fact that two former teachers are the bi-partisan sponsors of House Bill 154 is part of why we are strongly supportive of this measure. These gentlemen, Representatives Jones and Miller, know first-hand what is needed to meet the challenges of providing a quality education in troubled school districts. And the current state takeover law is not getting the job done.

The state takeover and the resulting loss of local control in Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland schools have not helped the students in those districts. If current law is not changed, over the next two years, state government could take away local control from Dayton, Columbus, Canton, Mansfield, Lima, Toledo, Ashtabula, Euclid, North College Hill and Painesville schools. It's time for this to end. Let's not do any more damage to other school districts.

We support House Bill 154 because it would do the following:

- Repeal the ill-conceived law that allows the state to takeover local school districts that are deemed to be in trouble.
- Restore local control to elected school boards.
- Hold school districts accountable by requiring school improvement teams and plans in F-rated school buildings.



As my colleagues and our fellow OEA members in Youngstown and Lorain have experienced, the current state takeover law provides no citizen oversight through elected school boards, no voice for classroom teachers and has been bad for our kids. Our experience in Youngstown and Lorain has demonstrated that the Academic Distress Commission/CEO model does not work. We believe that no more districts should be taken over, and that the districts that have been taken over should be relieved of that burden. That is why the first part of House Bill 154 is so important - repeal.

It is also important to note that state takeovers are based on misleading state report cards that severely penalize students and districts in poverty. After the failed state takeover law is repealed and local control is restored, OEA stands ready to work with state lawmakers to fix Ohio's broken and misleading report card system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Academic Distress Commission language from HB 154 that has been included in Substitute HB 166. We are available for any questions you may have.