



Thank you Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and Senate Education Committee members for giving me the opportunity today to provide testimony on the proposed amendment to Ohio's academic distress commission (ADC) law.

My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy and Advocacy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The Fordham Institute is an education-focused nonprofit that conducts research, analysis, and policy advocacy with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C.

As many of you know, Fordham has—while acknowledging changes are needed—been highly critical of recent efforts to repeal ADCs. We believe that this amendment, which creates a new process for intervening in persistently low performing districts and establishes school improvement commissions (where necessary), is a huge step in the right direction.

There are several reasons why we strongly urge you to include this amendment in the budget.

- 1) It begins the intervention process after one year of an overall grade of F.** Under current law, districts must receive three consecutive, overall F's before they face intervention. While such a slow moving timeline might work well for adults, the students these schools serve deserve a more urgent solution. By designating districts as "in need of improvement" and requiring them to both undergo a root cause analysis and create an improvement plan after just one year of poor performance, the law will ensure that serious efforts to improve student learning begin as soon as student results indicate there might be a problem.
- 2) Local school districts drive initial improvement efforts.** One of the most common criticisms of ADCs is that they eliminate local control. This amendment would address those concerns by allowing struggling school districts to take the lead in crafting their own improvement plans. The plans themselves aid community participation by requiring the convening of community stakeholder groups in their development. These are important changes that should greatly improve the operational dynamics of Ohio's school improvement efforts. Districts, unlike under the current system, have the option—but aren't required—to contract with a school improvement organization with the state picking up the tab. This gives those districts who want help to improve, but lack either the necessary expertise or financial resources, the means to do it. At the end of the day, the goal has always been to help districts avoid more intensive intervention efforts. This amendment does that.
- 3) There is clear accountability for districts that fail to improve.** The ADC revisions included in the House's version of the budget would allow persistently low performing districts to continue implementing locally created improvement plans indefinitely, regardless of whether the plans actually improve student learning. That's a clear abdication of the state's responsibility to students and families. This amendment is a far better option, as it would require districts that have failed to improve after five consecutive years—as well as districts that aren't following

their plans with fidelity—to transition to the more rigorous intervention of a school improvement commission. It’s also worth noting that this amendment outlines clear exit criteria from “in need of improvement” status for districts that improve.

- 4) **School improvement commissions are public entities that must engage with the stakeholders in a transparent way.** Another common criticism of ADCs is that the CEO wasn’t accountable to or transparent with the local community. This amendment addresses that complaint in a variety of ways. First and foremost, all commission members must be residents of the county or an adjacent county to where the district is located. The amendment also requires the school improvement director—appointed by the commission—to appear before the district and give quarterly reports about the progress of the district. In addition, the commission is required to conduct an annual performance evaluation of the director and submit it to the local school board.

The debate over ADCs thus far has been contentious and intense. Improving low performing schools is hard work. When this body first indicated its desire to tackle the issues surrounding ADCs, I’ll admit that I was skeptical.

I’ve changed my mind. The principles exemplified by this amendment are sound, and the solutions offered are extremely promising. This is a smart, well-thought out response to some of the loudest criticisms of House Bill 70. I urge you to include this language in your finalized version of the budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I’m happy to answer any questions that you may have.