

Am. SubHB166 Opponent Testimony
For Hearing Date June 13, 2019
Senate Education Committee

Distinguished Chair Senator Lehner, Vice Chair Senator Tehrar, Ranking Member Senator Fedor and the distinguished members of the Committee, I thank you sincerely for allowing me to offer written testimony to this legislation, Amended Sub. HB 166

I regret that I'm unable to submit it in face to face testimony. Family obligations have precluded me from traveling to Columbus a second day in a row. Some of you may recall my testimony in support of HB166 as passed by the House and including specific language from HB154.

Among the items that will be beneficial to my students in Youngstown, Ohio, I am encouraged by the "building by building" school improvement model, presented in the language of 166 as passed by the House, to provide for a needs analysis and plan unique to the needs of the building. My sincere concern regarding this proposed amendment is that while there is provision for individual plans for schools as well as a district plan, the *School Improvement Commission* are required to conduct a "root cause" review, rather than a needs assessment. As a teacher I'm dumbfounded by this language change to the text. To what end is a root cause analysis beneficial? Moreover, how in heaven's name can a team of people determine a specific cause for dropping performance of a school (other than the obvious of high staff & leadership turnover, high poverty, and the perpetual exodus of higher scoring students to school choice programs both in and outside of the school district)? What difference does it make, seriously? Without addressing needs, causes are irrelevant. This text is written as though our schools have existed for decades. Youngstown, for example, have gone through multiple reconstitutions, openings and closings of buildings for over a decade. Not a single building, not even Maria Pappas' gem, Paul C. Bunn, consists of the same staff and students (demographically speaking) that existed in that building in 2010 prior to her departure from the district. You can read Ms. Pappas testimony from May 29, but I assure you, as an educator who has been in the district since the first ADC and consistently throughout, our district started seeing improvements after the majority of the bleed out of higher performing students to school choice options stabilized and some time before the 2015 ADC was formed. The problem is, Ms. Pappas wasn't around to see this and mistakenly credits the improvements to the outgoing CEO Krish Mohip, and not the infrastructure built over a 7 year period with a foundational literacy framework, "Literacy Collaborative" which was research based and implemented in conjunction with Ohio State University, as well as a substantial and solid Social Emotional Learning Platform with ongoing support from CASEL associates and through funding acquired by Congressman Tim Ryan for the Mahoning Valley. Warren City schools are still listed on their website as a partner district, while sadly, Youngstown no longer is.

Fast forward to this amendment, which if enacted would increase state oversight and continue reducing the local control of democratically elected school boards. The premise, I would

imagine, for a state oversight board, in name the *School Transformation Board* to ensure that the CEO was accountable to some body, possibly will yield a slight improvement over the status quo; however, I maintain with certainty, that the local community suffering the loss of their democratic right to elect an authority school board will not feel as though they have been consoled. In this proposed amendment, we still will have a CEO of our district, only now renamed *School Improvement Director*, yet still has all of the same powers of the CEO, except the omission of “financial” control, the CEO enjoyed. There also appear to be some provisions for local the local elected Board of Education to make some recommendations, but they were already able to do that. The reality of HB70 was that the CEO had total control and didn’t have to listen to them. I read in the text how the CEO can be held accountable if the plans are not followed as deemed by the *School Transformation Board*, and that schools can be closed, chartered or reconstituted, as they can under current law, but I honestly fail to see how this will benefit students? Consistency is what they need. Based on our experience with the CEO, how can anyone expect a *School Improvement Director* to fare any better or last any longer?

In addition, I’d like to address the third generation evolution of the ADC, henceforth under this amendment to be known as the “*School Improvement Commission*”. This will certainly NOT be the last evolution of the ADC, and as an educator I’m seriously grieved by the text of this amendment that the Mayor’s appointee is required to be a business person and not a person experienced in the world of academia. The nature of a public school is a socialist enterprise. We serve everyone regardless of their ability to pay to be a client. How can the goals and expectations from a business person in a capitalistic society structure possibly glean any insight into serving the masses in a publicly funded institution? I am also extremely unimpressed and disheartened by the language that states that only 1 state appointee need be an educator. So seriously, one state appointee must be an educator, 2 others are by virtue of their positions (teacher & school board President) - but thank you for throwing us organized labor a bone by having our Union President being the appointer, although then taking it back by making the teacher a non-voting member, and one appointee is forbidden from being an academic person; therefore, there is a strong likelihood in this set up only 50% of a *School Improvement Commission* to actually be persons with knowledge in this arena. That reality is staggeringly fear-provoking and pragmatically absurd. The common consensus of current criticism of the education reform movement is that people making decisions for education have no experience in education. The makeup of the “SIC” in this amendment text is a complete personification of that widespread complaint. At least on Strickland & Kasich’s original ADCs we had experts in the field of education, until ADC 2.0 was enacted in 2015.

Finally, we are now able to get to the “follow the money” issue, or as most people would say, the “bottom line”. In both communities where CEOs have been leading in Ohio, unaccountable spending has been an issue, so much so that it is being addressed in this amendment, although it was better in HB154 by having the School Board retain control over spending and subject to state oversight through traditional channels. In this proposed new model, there is no indication that reduced spending would occur what with consultant fees, “experts” and “organizations” to be consulted and providing consultation. I can imagine which conglomerates are already

preparing their proposals for the multitude of RFPs that will be generated by future *School Improvement Directors* under the oversight of the *Ohio School Transformation Board*. I seriously doubt this will amount to increased funding for actual per pupil expenditure on real and tangible classroom supplies. I am teaching 8th grade science in a building built for PreK-4 instruction. A science lab would be nice, but this text will in no way address that need as a HB154 School Improvement Team would. One of my students' biggest complaints (fallen on deaf ears) is that they are middle school students in an elementary school building. The middle school buildings made PreK-8 buildings in Youngstown still have no signs of playground equipment being brought in despite 2 complete school years in this structure. Imagine attending a school with no playground as a Kindergartener? This is the thought I'll leave you with Senators. In my previous testimony I labeled it "a world of unintended consequences". This new amendment does nothing to address that shortcoming and the thousands of others I could cite with the loss of our locally elected leadership being able to control our district. People who know our children and love them. Their grandparents, Aunts, Uncles and even parents who were elected to our school board. People who, if they were in control, would not have their youngest children being educated in a building without a playground while millions are spent on expensive consultants.

Senators, that is where I'll leave you with my thoughts, as I read further in the text to see the words "collective bargaining agreement" numerous times and simply don't have the stomach to continue reading at this point, being my family's primary income earner working already one year on an expired unnegotiated contract.

In conclusion, I urge you to reject this amendment and support the original text of HB154 in the budget bill 166 as passed by the House. Bottom up reform is not only what makes sense, but is also endorsed by the experts, and is more evidence based than ANY state takeover model. As you should recall Dr. Eugene Sanders, who must obviously be the state's foremost expert on the topic, being called first to testify on the matter May 29, did endorse HB154 as written.