



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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this esteemed 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.

You may remember that the Board of *Public Education Partners* (PEP) continues to be adamantly opposed to House Bill 70 - Ohio's school takeover law. Ohioans 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 PEP Board commends Representatives Miller and Jones on the thoughtful research they incorporated into the language of 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 154 is a promising policy offering support for lower performing school districts, and it was designed to dissolve and replace academic distress commissions and to encourage wraparound services for high-poverty schools. House Bill 154 is an evidence-based model that was created using results from a 5-year research study of school turnaround by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in MA. Those field-tested results are the basis for the language of HB 154.

House Bill 154 addresses the concerns of educators, school district leaders, and community members. It passed without amendment in the Ohio House of Representatives by a bipartisan vote of 82-12, so now it's up to the Ohio Senate to also act in a bipartisan manner to pass this well-researched plan.

Just like 2015, a secret partisan group (which includes some of the same people who turned HB 70 into a school takeover law) surfaced last month with its alternative "Ohio School Transformation Plan" - another untested school takeover plan with no research

to back it up. That 17-page plan, drafted by school privatization advocates, has been “turned-around” into a 68-page sub. Amendment to the budget that is certain to be a lucrative deal for the many outside “consultants” and “school improvement organizations.”

The lengthy proposed amendment uses changes in terminology to fool the undiscerning eye (academic distress commissions = school improvement commissions; chief executive officers = school improvement directors), but it’s the same old tired efforts to change the governance of lower-performing underfunded public schools that will not result in the infusion of needed resources. How does this plan address poverty, which has already been analyzed as the root cause of lower school grade cards?

WHY do the framers of the Ohio School Transformation Plan assume 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?

Even though over 600 traditional public school districts in Ohio serve more than 1.8 million students, the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio General Assembly depend way too much on so-called school-choice lobbyists and 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, and local community members who continue to demand the end of state takeovers of public school districts.

PEP supports the complete and immediate elimination of HB 70 by keeping the bipartisan HB 154 language in the budget to repeal and replace Ohio’s failed school takeover agenda. The Youngstown, Lorain, and East Cleveland School Districts cannot withstand further disruption from an untested and highly questionable plan designed without the input of public school district stakeholders. Those school districts require the clear-cut evidence-based steps included in House Bill 154.

Please do not endorse another school takeover plan that was written without any input from local government leaders, locally elected school boards, and education organizations that support public school districts. We request that you reject HB 70, as well as this alternative school takeover plan, that were both drafted in secret. Thoughtful education policy-making can never happen within a culture of secrecy. Surely, Ohio is better than that.

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 families.

Jeanne Melvin, President, *Public Education Partners*

