



State Representative Joe Miller
Senate Education Committee - HB 154 Testimony
June 25, 2019

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 154. HB 154 addresses Ohio's growing state takeover dilemma and provides the framework we've heard students, teachers, administrators, and parents ask for: a school turnaround process that engages local stakeholders, directs a meaningful performance audit to identify challenges, and provides the flexibility to implement solutions with fidelity.

HB 154 has had an interesting path to this point. The bill started in the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, receiving three hearings and hours of testimony, before it was approved overwhelmingly by the Ohio House. It was also part of the House-passed version of the state budget, and its inclusion was discussed and debated as the budget was considered here in the Senate.

Throughout the process, nearly everyone I have heard from or talked to has agreed, at least in one respect: the Ohio General Assembly needs to take action on this issue. We cannot kick this can down the road to be dealt with another day. Three communities have already been consumed by the debate over state takeovers, with many more on the horizon. It is time for us to come together around a plan and erase the uncertainty over what comes next for these districts. It is my hope and belief that HB 154 will be that plan.

My home district of Lorain is a textbook example of the underlying issue with the status quo. Since day one, there has been a fundamental disconnect we've never been able to bridge. On one side, the state-controlled Academic Distress Commission, their chosen CEO, and the rapidly growing group of new administrators he has brought with him. On the other side, the locally-elected school board and the majority of existing community

stakeholders. Knowing how difficult school improvement is, even in the best of circumstances, we simply can't expect success when those two groups are at odds.

It will take more than tinkering around the edges of HB 70 to get everyone on the same page. We need a fundamental shift that empowers local communities while providing them the necessary support and structure to ensure they're on the right path.

This outlook informs the central tenet of HB 154. Simply stated, HB 154 restores community ownership over the school improvement process. Local buy-in is an essential component of school turnaround. What we've seen in Lorain and Youngstown is that when you don't provide a meaningful way for residents and stakeholders to have their voice heard, be part of the turnaround process, and have skin in the game - the likelihood for success is slim to none.

HB 154 has two major components. The first piece is moving our state beyond the ADC/CEO model that simply hasn't worked. Places like Lorain and Youngstown need a fresh start. I can tell you in Lorain, the constant barrage of dysfunction, last-minute changes and infighting have worn people down. They need a moment to regroup, turn the page and shift the conversation to what will work, so we can come together and provide our children with the quality education they deserve.

HB 154 lays out a framework for communities to have that very discussion. Our intent was to recognize that everyone has had a different path up to this point, and moving forward will have a different path to success. We also recognize that school districts are not homogenous entities. Needed services in a rural district may not be what is needed in an urban district, and what works in a district's middle school might not make sense for its high school. That's why HB 154 moves away from triggers based on district report cards towards building-based assessment and reform. This change also removes the ability for districts to hide behind a solid overall grade and avoid addressing their low-performing buildings.

HB 154 has been thoroughly vetted, debated, and improved through the committee process. I hope you will agree it is the right solution to move Ohio forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB 154.