

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, ranking member Craig, and the honored members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee,

My name is Maddie Sheets. I write you today in support of SB22. This bill is vital to Ohio's future, and most essentially the future of our youth. I am an intervention specialist in central Ohio. The opinions that I express here represent my personal and professional experience throughout this pandemic and in no way represent the school district in which I work.

I am an Early Childhood Intervention Specialist. This means that I work with children who are three to five years old who have been identified as having a disability. This year my students have experienced primarily a hybrid model in which they attend school two half days per week in person and 'online' for the other two half days. Online learning is inaccessible to typically developing three to five year old children, let alone children who have been identified as having a disability. Online learning for my students requires that an adult is available in the child's home to help them navigate their assignments and class meetings. Even with cooperation from parents and our best efforts, some of my children do not attend online learning regularly. Whether this is due to parent work schedules, language barriers, or multiple older children in the home who are also expected to be learning online. Another amazing part of my job this school year is that I am part of the team that completes initial assessments for children that we suspect may have a disability. Working on this team this year has been eye opening. When speaking with parents of these children, many will mention that their child left private therapy services or that these services were discontinued due to COVID-19 and their child has not been back since March 2020. This disruption to services, for some of our students, is absolutely detrimental. Many of our students in Ohio are falling through the cracks and missing vital early intervention that could get them on track prior to Kindergarten.

Governor Dewine's policies have continued to center around fear, rather than the actual data. Governor Dewine and his team of 'experts' have continued to manipulate statistics and make false claims based on, 'what they think may happen.' Here is what I KNOW has happened. My students, and many in our district, have lost half of the in-person, research based intervention that are afforded to them as a child with a disability. It is their right to receive the early intervention that they need to reach their full potential and be ready for Kindergarten and beyond.

I also KNOW that in September there was proof from other countries and other states that COVID-19 does not spread in school settings efficiently. Yet, Governor Dewine recommended that schools begin the school year either fully remote or in a hybrid learning model. This recommendation was based on fear not on real data.

Finally, I KNOW that private and parochial schools have had the opportunity to continue their education almost uninterrupted (typically five days per week with minimal disruptions to traditional education). We have not seen massive spikes in these settings. The gap between the children from privileged wealthy families and those children who live in poverty is becoming wider and wider based on the Governor's policies.

Governor Dewine has continued to ignore these, and many other, long term unintended consequences of the COVID-19 protocols that he has put into place. It is time for the legislature to work on behalf of ALL people in the state of Ohio and work to protect ALL of the vulnerable populations, including our children. There can be no more excuses. Our youth are suffering and they are running out of time.

Sincerely,
Maddie Sheets