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### **SB 246 Sponsor Testimony**

Thank you Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education Committee for allowing me the opportunity to explain SB 246 to the House Education committee. As I am sure you are aware this bill was amended into Rep LaTourette and Patterson's School Safety Bill 318.

Let me acknowledge my appreciation to both Representatives for graciously allowing the Senate to amend SB 246 into HB 318 because by doing so it will allow the important provisions in the bill to go into effect a full year sooner than it might otherwise due to the challenging time frame we face.

There are two basic components to the Safe Act- Supporting Alternatives for Fair Education. The first is addressing the overuse of suspension and expulsion in Ohio Schools and the second is the promotion of more effective means of discipline which encourage learning and improve school climate.

It may surprise you to learn that in 2016-17 more than 34,000 children **pre-k through 3 grade** were suspended from Ohio Schools. That number doesn't even include the thousands of pre-schoolers who are "asked" to dis-enroll but for whom data is not collected.

When a young child is removed from school the message whether intended or not is clear....you are not wanted, who are not welcome, you are not safe here. More likely than not, the child returns to school emotionally wounded but also academically behind; perhaps never to catch up. A child who is suspended from school at an early age is 10 times more likely to drop out of school before graduating from high school. An early suspension is universally regarded as the first step in the school to prison pipeline.

Simply put, suspension and expulsion practices are harmful to young students and there is considerable evidence that they do nothing to change behavior or improve classroom discipline...in fact they do just the opposite.

SB 246 narrows the circumstances for which young students (preK-3<sup>rd</sup> grade) may be suspended or expelled to those situations where a student's behavior poses a serious risk to the health and safety of fellow students or staff.

The bill does not prohibit in school suspensions but does require that in school suspensions be in a supervised setting where students are provided an opportunity to complete assignments.

Schools are not being asked to eliminate some exclusionary practices overnight but rather are given a three year period in which to implement the policy. As they incrementally decrease the prevalence of suspension and expulsions the bill provides tools to develop a district designed framework for Positive Behavior intervention and Supports, known as PBIS. PBIS is a model for creating positive school environments which support the needs of all students and staff. It involves creating a shared vision of appropriate behavior for students.

PBIS is not a new requirement. Ohio Schools were tasked with this in 2015 and many of them are well on their way and implementing this with real fidelity. Others have yet to start. Two federal grants are in place to help schools build capacity for PBIS...Project Aware and The School Climate Transformation Grant. A \$2 million additional appropriation is included in SB 246 for FY 19 to provide additional resources for schools.

If a child does not readily demonstrate expected behaviors, schools should not view this a opportunity to punish but rather to teach. If a child doesn't know how to swim, we teach them, If a child doesn't know how to read, we teach them....but somehow if a child doesn't know how to behave....we punish them.

Think of this in terms of the soft skills we so frequently refer to when it comes to the workforce. Employers are always telling us that new workers come to them totally lacking "soft skills". What do they mean? They will tell you they need workers who come to work on time, who stay on task, who can communicate with their fellow workers. These are the exact same skills that young students need to be successful...the ability to come to class prepared to learn, who don't interrupt when the teacher is talking, who show respect for school property and their fellow students. Traditionally these are skills that children learn before they even come to school but as more and more children are coming from intergenerational poverty their parents lack these skills themselves, let alone teach them to their children.

Students struggling to behave need to supported in the same way we support students struggling to read. Unfortunately teachers are not always adequately prepared to do this which is why SB 246 places certain expectations on schools of education to better prepare teachers to help students develop the social emotional skills they need to control behavior. Teachers also need to know how to discern mischievous behavior from behavior that is a direct result of trauma in a child's life so the bill requires training on the impact of trauma, toxic stress and other environmental variable the impact learning behavior.

Teachers and administrators who are already in the classroom are required to complete a professional development course on PBIS within the three year implementation window. Local control over professional development will be maintained as each district's local professional development committee will monitor compliance with this requirement and establish model professional development courses. The bill does not increase the hours of professional development required by a licensed teacher...it merely requires that all teachers receive some

training in this realm. I can't think of a single other legislative requirement that has been more embraced by teachers than this one.

This legislation has been in the works for almost two years. When I first started on this issue no state had any laws limiting suspension or expulsion. I expected a real up-hill battle. However at this point we are hardly pioneers as 23 states have enacted legislation limiting exclusionary discipline and promoting social and emotional learning. Social emotional learning has become one of the most talked about issues in education circles. There was not a single opponent who came into testify against the bill.

It has garnered support from OEA, OFT, some local school districts as well as the Conservative Juvenile Justice Network, Nationwide Children's Hospital, Dayton Children's Hospital, the Autism Center for Low Incidents, the State University Education Deans, and many more. The bill passed the Senate unanimously and I hope it will receive similar treatment in the House. I will be happy to take any questions.