Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on SB216. My name is Vickie Briercheck and I am a newly retired principal and gifted coordinator.

I have done much reflection regarding the proposal in SB 216, which would prohibit any requirement for adequate professional development in gifted education to classroom teachers who are tasked with providing gifted services to gifted children. Over the years I have struggled with what really is the best setting for gifted children to have their unique educational needs met. I have concluded that each district and child is unique. Districts should have flexibility so long as those making the decisions know and understand gifted children. This rarely happens. In general, I am wary of too many regulations. However, in this case, the arguments against this professional development standard:

* Deny a preponderance of best practice research;
* Demonstrate a lack of understanding of the actual expectation
* Reveal a lack of understanding regarding gifted children and their educational needs.

I respectfully ask you to consider each of these points as elaborated below.

In reviewing the testimony given on this bill against High Quality Professional Development (HQPD) for regular classroom teachers, there has been no reference to any research that negates the research supporting HQPD. The provision was well supported by a preponderance of studies. Research has determined that any HQPD which does not hit a thirty-hour threshold, with strong objectives, and which does not have ongoing qualified support does not change practice and is a waste of time and money. One superintendent indicated that he trusted his teachers to make the best decisions for students based on data. That is not the issue. Teachers can’t make those quality decisions if they don’t have the necessary knowledge and skills. Why would superintendents want to do less and get nothing, thus wasting time and money?

Another superintendent said, “All teachers with gifted licensure are already required to meet a six-hour licensure renewal requirement. By directing that this professional development be completed in gifted education, this objective could be completed without further mandate.” The expectation is not for those who have a gifted license but for those who have little to no knowledge regarding gifted children and their needs. Some erroneously believe all teachers must have the HQPD. Not true. Also, this is not a mandate. So long as the district does not say they are serving students in the regular classroom, the teachers don’t need training. This decision is entirely up to each district. The standards provide a variety of ways in which gifted students can be served.

Just last week I had an on line discussion with a college professor who devotes one day of one course (educational psychology) to gifted children. I was told this day was the only pre-service training teacher candidates receive regarding gifted children. She admitted she had no background or knowledge in the area of gifted education. As our conversation went on, her lack of knowledge was frightening. She was also a mother who suddenly realized how little she knew as a parent of a newly identified gifted child. What really bothered her was that she was all too aware that the teachers of her child knew less than she did.

Few educators, especially superintendents know very little to nothing about gifted children. A newly hired non-credentialed gifted coordinator once complained about having to go back to school and get her gifted endorsement. Puzzled, I wanted to know why she thought she didn’t need it. She said, “I have a superintendent’s license!” I then asked her how many classes she had in gifted. The answer was, of course, none. There is a body of knowledge regarding this population and their unique characteristics and learning needs. People making decisions for these children must have this knowledge.

Finally this comes down to logic. Either we need to remove the service setting in the regular classroom (which I believe limits choice), or make sure those working with gifted children understand them and how gifted children best learn. Otherwise, there is in reality no service. It can be done, because many districts large and small are doing it with amazing results. If one rural, city or suburban district can manage this then all of them can do it. It is the right thing to do.