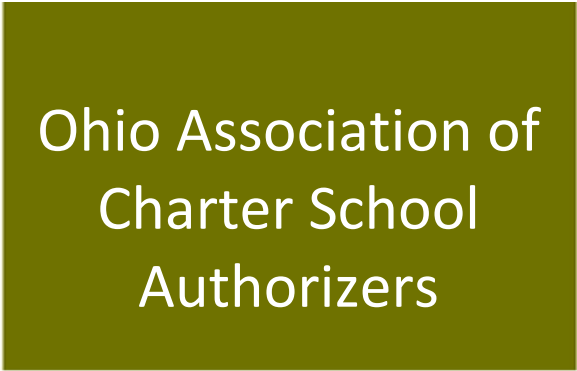




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**Senate Education Committee
April 11, 2018
Testimony on H.B. 21**

Good afternoon Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee. I'm Jennifer Schorr, Associate Director of the Education Division of Buckeye Community Hope Foundation, which is one of Ohio's four largest sponsors.

I am testifying before you today as Chair of the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers (OACSA). Thank you for the opportunity to share OACSA's perspective on the need to amend H.B. 21 to address urgent issues of concern regarding Ohio's charter school sponsor performance assessment.

Let me begin by saying that OACSA members fully support the legislature's efforts to improve accountability and performance within Ohio's charter sector. We believe that the process must be equitable and transparent.

As you know, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is charged with annually assessing the performance of charter school sponsors. ODE's implementation of the assessment is based on the recommendations of a three-man panel, which were characterized by the National Association of Charter Schools Authorizers as reflecting a "serious misunderstanding of the role of charter school authorizers." Although many stakeholders – and some members of the State Board of Education -- offered feedback on the implementation framework, no changes were made and implementation began with the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years, which were conducted simultaneously.

Most stakeholders would agree that the implementation was difficult, not only in that the first assessment occurred after the end of the 2013-2014 school year, but also with countless changes in requirements, significant delays in ODE's response to sponsors' questions for technical assistance, and proposed retroactive administrative rules.

When the implementation framework was presented to the State Board of Education – for their information, not their approval – ODE staff made it quite clear that, over time, the scoring rubric would be made tougher, with the first proposed change to occur with the 2017-2018 school year. ODE announced late last month that it would not implement the changes to the rubric for the current

school year, but it's important to understand that ODE has the authority to reconsider that decision and has made many changes throughout the first three years of the initiative.

OACSA and its members have offered a number of suggestions on how to improve the sponsor evaluation system (SES), but limits its focus to two urgent issues for which we seek amendments to H.B. 21.

The first is on the scoring rubric. Under ODE's implementation framework, a sponsor could earn passing scores in each of the three components – “meets standards” in both the Academic and Quality components, and “effective” in the Compliance component – yet receive an overall rating of “ineffective.” Clearly, this aspect of the framework is deeply flawed, and there are significant negative consequences associated with unfairly rating any sponsor as “ineffective.” “Ineffective” sponsors are prohibited from sponsoring any additional schools, and those receiving three consecutive “ineffective” ratings lose their sponsorship authority. We ask you to amend H.B. 21 to prohibit ODE from rating any sponsor that receives component ratings of “meets standards” and “effective” as overall “ineffective.”

The second relates to process. Given the many changes in expectations and deadlines – and ODE's slow response to questions and requests for clarification – we propose a reasonable deadline of January 15 of each year for the ODE to make all details related to the assessment (standards, procedures, timelines, scoring rubric and any other requirements to be used in rating sponsors) available. We also ask that a reasonable public comment period (at least 120 days) be put into place, and that ODE be required to submit a report to the legislature that includes all public comments received, with finalized details posted on ODE's website by July 15.

It's worth noting that the Center for Education Reform's “National Charter School Law Rankings & Scorecard 2018” published last month points out that there is no correlation between Ohio charter school quality and authorizer ratings.

It's also important to recognize the potential consequences of failure to address these problems. For the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years combined, 29 sponsors (all are districts and educational service centers) have lost the authority to sponsor charter schools -- some of which were high academic performers. Fifty-two “ineffective” ratings were assigned to sponsors for those two school years (with all but one being districts and ESCs). Any evaluation that revokes the sponsorship authority and closes high performing public schools is flawed. Any evaluation that has significant changes to the content, criteria, and scoring every year is flawed.

We believe that Ohio's sponsor evaluation system, particularly the quality practices component, has the potential to improve authorizing, which ultimately helps charter schools. We ask for your assistance in making changes to improve the process in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions you may have.