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## Ohio Conservative Juvenile Justice Network

### Testimony in Support of SB 246

Issued: March 20, 2018

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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio Conservative Juvenile Justice Network (OCJN) in support of Senate Bill 246.

My name is Michael Hartley and I serve as the Executive Director of the OCJN. The OCJN is a coalition of conservative leaders whose goal is to provide a vehicle for individuals, organizations, and businesses to become leaders in the juvenile justice reform effort. OCJN's founding members include **Evelyn Stratton**, former Ohio Supreme Court Justice, **Betty Montgomery**, former Ohio attorney general and auditor of state; **Col. Tom Moe** (ret.), former director of Ohio Veteran Service, **Dr. Reginald Wilkinson**, former director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction, **Tyler Duvelius**, Ohio Director, Christian Coalition, and **Holly Gross**, Vice President, Columbus Chamber of Commerce. From the OCJN perspective, I would like to highlight a couple of reasons we support SB 246.

#### **The Case for Business Leadership – A Robust Future Ohio Workforce**

As a former VP with the Columbus Chamber working directly with the central Ohio business community, Ohio needs a workforce that is trained and dependable. A strong education foundation is essential to a strong workforce. This begins with ensuring that our youngest children get off on the right start academically and social-emotionally and stay positively engaged in school. By limiting school removals for our youngest students, SB 246 prevents academic failure and school disengagement for children who would otherwise be removed from school and other healthy supports. Children need to be in school to learn and teachers need to have the tools to help ensure struggling students are not left behind.

#### **Why the Early Years are Especially Critical with Student Discipline**

It has been stated, "A child's **early years set the trajectory for the relationships and successes** they will experience for the rest of their lives, making it crucial that children's earliest experiences truly foster – and never harm – their development. As such, expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings, two stressful and negative experiences young children and their families may encounter in early childhood programs, should be prevented, severely limited, and eventually eliminated."

#### **The Short & Long-term Impacts of Disciplinary Exclusion Put Children (& Working Parents) on a Perilous Path**

When students are removed from school as a disciplinary measure, the odds increase dramatically that they will repeat a grade, drop out, or become involved in the juvenile justice system. This not only undermines student opportunities for personal success but Ohio's future workforce and economic prosperity. Consider the following:

- **We need all of our students to stay in school and graduate:** Ohio's overall high school graduation rate is 80.7% (the national average is 83.2%). Put another way, about 1 in 5 students drop out or do not complete high school in Ohio and these graduation rates are much worse for low income students and African American boys.
  - Ohio graduation rate for Black males, the group most impacted by harsh disciplinary practices, is 53.9% compared to 59% nationally (putting Ohio at 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for graduating black male students,

including behind some of our sister states like Kentucky, West Virginia and Pennsylvania which are all *above* the national average).

- o Low income students are also less likely to complete high school in Ohio compared to the U.S. or similar sister states. Ohio ranks in the bottom 12 states for graduation rates for low income students. Low income students are also disproportionately subject to exclusionary discipline. The graduation rate for low income students in 2014-2015 was 68.7% in Ohio compared with 76.1% nationally and 84.2% in Indiana, 84.8% in Kentucky, 75.9% in Pennsylvania and 82.9% in West Virginia.
- ***School discipline is connected to academic failure and school disconnectedness:*** A Texas study found **students with at least one disciplinary contact were 5 times more likely to drop out of school compared to those without any disciplinary contact.** This is not surprising given that when students are removed from school, missed class time results in losing important learning time. Learning is a cumulative process so students can fall quickly behind. Suspensions also do not address underlying causes of student misbehavior nor offer the social-emotional tools to effectively communicate, manage and resolve conflict, etc.; as such, they do not effectively equip students with the skills needed to address potential future behavior challenges. Finally, exclusionary discipline practices that remove students from school not only undermine students' academic achievements but, in part by isolating students and alienating them from peers and teachers, weaken their overall connections with school.
- ***Academic failure and school alienation is a known pathway to prison:*** Students who do not graduate high school **are significantly more likely to go to prison than those who do graduate;** according to a 2012 Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections report, roughly 80% of Ohio's adult prisoners are high-school dropouts. And the link to risk-taking and potentially criminal behavior for these students begins much earlier. As noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, when students are suspended or expelled, they often stay home unsupervised, increasing the chances of behavior that can lead to juvenile court involvement. The degree to which students experience school alienation versus school bonding is one of the strongest variables in predicting delinquency. As a side note, the costs associated with the court system, incarceration and victim expenses, in addition to the lost earnings potential of those incarcerated, is a further drain on our economy.
- ***Working parents work productivity impacted when their children are suspended.*** When children, particularly young children in the pre-k and elementary school setting, are removed from school an adult must still supervise them. This adult is usually a parent who must stay home to care for young children excluded from school. Not only may this effect their work productivity but ultimately can put parents at risk of losing their job, creating an additional level of financial stress on the family and contribute to workforce instability.

### **Moving Forward: Having Tools & Supports in Place for Student Success**

This bill strengthens the likelihood that students stay in school on a pathway of opportunity, thus contributing to a prepared, future workforce for our state. Building on the important efforts of the Ohio Department of Education in strengthening student supports, this legislation recognizes the importance of professional development and support for early childhood and elementary teachers responsible for managing classroom behavior. Finally, by ensuring relevant data collection and reporting, it ensures data-driven decision-making to inform strategies and practices to further reduce the unnecessary use of school removal for our young students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before your committee. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.