



**Representative Jeff Crossman
House District 15**

**House Bill (H.B.) 40: Waive State Testing for 2020-21 School Year
February 9, 2020**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee – thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today with my joint sponsor Rep. Lisa Sobecki in support of House Bill 40. As you heard, HB 40 seeks to waive the remaining State Testing currently required for the 2020-21 School year.

I could spend my time talking about the policy implications involved with this legislation but, instead, I wanted to give you a sense of some of the real stories I have heard from people across the State of Ohio. They have contacted both Rep. Sobecki and me urging us to continue pushing this legislation. It is what constituents are all demanding and the reason why we have committed ourselves to continue pushing this legislation since the beginning of COVID a year ago.

Last week, I received a message from a 17 year veteran educator who wanted to share her experience and her experience. It was eerily similar to many stories I have heard, but I thought her message perfectly articulated what is needed to be communicated to this committee from others. She writes:

I have been assigned as the building testing coordinator during for the past 17 years. This is the most time consuming and least meaningful part of my job. But this is not about me, it's about our children.

Our students have not had a traditional school year for an entire year now. Forced to close in March of 2020 and pivoting back and forth between in person and

online learning has been challenging for students to say the least. The number of students failing classes is at an all-time high, with many of our students suffering from depression, anxiety, family illness, technical issues or a simple lack of motivation due to a variety of factors like job loss and isolation. Trust me when I say that they have not learned the content of the curriculum as they would in a traditional year, through no fault of their teachers. Our teachers have been teaching synchronously this entire school year - presenting information to a live classroom of students while delivering the same information to online students at the exact same time. I'm not sure if any legislators have attempted to have a successful meeting in this format, but it is extremely difficult to keep everyone engaged and learning, much less doing simple things like making sure everyone can see and hear what's being presented.

Combine this with the number of students who have elected to stay virtual, due to their compromised immune systems or members of their families, the number of students who have contracted COVID themselves, or been exposed by someone in their family, classroom, sports team or other event. At some points in the fall, our list of quarantined students was well over 200 per day - in addition to those 200 opting to stay virtual, in a building of 1200.

In December when we originally planned to deliver the Biology End of Course tests, over 500 of our students were virtual by then. We were forced to postpone the test until January 2021. We asked the virtual students who completed Biology in the fall semester to report in the evening to take the tests, despite their safety concerns. Sophomores and juniors (or transfer students) who needed to retest to meet the permanent graduation requirements were unable to retest because we simply did not have the time in the window.

We focused on our senior students' still requiring graduation points in January during the testing window. Consider that most of these 17-18 year old students have not yet met the 18 graduation points dictated by the state. These typically are not independent, motivated learners for a variety of reasons. These are our marginalized students - low socioeconomic status students with disabilities, racial minorities, or students with excessive trauma. What these tests do to these students is remind them "you still didn't make it," or say "you're not smart enough to graduate," or worse "you'll never be successful." These tests further marginalize the already marginalized and the current conditions only exacerbate this problem.



I want to thank the thoughtful educator for sending me this heartfelt testimony. I thought it was important to share with you and I agree with her implication that these tests are simply causing far more harm than any good that might come from them at this point. As legislators we should be doing everything we can to lift up and encourage young minds rather than imposing additional obstacles to a successful academic experience. Failing to take action on this legislation for nearly a year is irresponsible and harmful to precisely the students this educator highlighted, the students who are already struggling and at risk – the ones that we should be trying to help.

House Bill 40 will help course correct the effects that the pandemic has had on students over the past year and allow teachers to focus on giving them a practical and well-rounded education, rather than how to succeed on a standardized test of dubious value.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I'll be happy to answer any questions there may be.