



**Representative Joe Miller, 56th Ohio House District
House Primary & Secondary Education Committee – HB 54 Testimony
February 9th, 2021**

Good morning Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 54 with my joint sponsor, Rep. Cutrona, to dissolve Academic Distress Commissions and to instead require improvement plans for certain low-performing school buildings. This bill is a re-introduction of Sub. House Bill 154 from the 133rd General Assembly, which passed the House in a bipartisan fashion by a vote of 83-12.

House Bill 54 is intended to undo the damage that was caused by the implementation of House Bill 70, which was crammed through a late night Session back in 2015. Since 2015, a total of three schools --- Lorain, Youngstown, and East Cleveland --- were determined to be “failing” based on a flawed report card model, and taken hostage by corrupt CEOs while demonstrating no improvement. In HB 70’s own words, the CEO was given “complete operational, managerial, and instructional control” over the district, meanwhile, local stakeholders were stripped of any input, oversight, or power in the process.

In Lorain, I have heard from parents, teachers, administrators, and even students on this issue. Underpinning all their stories is a fundamental disconnect between the state-imposed administration and everyone else who makes up the community they’re ostensibly trying to serve. This feedback informs the central tenet of our bill, HB 54.

The truth is, these districts are in crisis. And the only way we can move forward is by moving past the top-down Academic Distress Commission model. School improvement isn’t something that can be imported into a school district; it has to be grown and supported locally. I have not heard any legislator, educator, administrator, “school improvement expert”, claim that we can improve our schools without getting buy-in from the community. And what we have right now simply doesn’t allow for that to take place.

When school districts such as Lorain are torn apart by a state-appointed CEO, it's our kids who suffer the consequences. When Columbus labels our teachers and administrators as failures for not being able to solve problems that we all know extend well beyond the classroom, it's our schools that lose out, as those talented individuals find jobs at other districts or leave the profession entirely. It's our families, our futures, our communities on the line here. We need the chance to be part of the solution.

The bottom line is this: Ohio has three school districts that the state has unjustly put under their control while demonstrating no improvement, and many more that will follow suit if we do not continue the moratorium on state takeovers.

House Bill 70 was an unvetted and untested experiment that has proven to be a failure, and proven to cause more disruption to teachers, administrators, parents, and most importantly, the education of our children. Simply stated, HB 54 restores community ownership over the quality of schools in their neighborhood, and allows for districts to implement a building-based improvement plan which takes into account the specific needs of their own communities.

I will continue to work with interested parties on this issue, as there is still much work to be done. I appreciate the opportunity to testify, and would be glad to answer any questions from the committee after testimony from my joint sponsor, Rep. Cutrona.