



House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
HB 12 - Opponent Testimony

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Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today in opposition to House Bill 12.

My name is Alison Paxson, and I am a Senior Policy Associate for Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. With more than four decades of advocacy on behalf of Ohio's children and youth, we are committed to being a strong, effective, and independent voice for all children who have no vote, no lobbyist, and no voice in the halls of power. I am therefore here today on behalf of Ohio's 1.7 million school children to urge this committee to not move forward with this bill intended to reform the State Board of Education and its functions and educational responsibilities.

The Ohio Department of Education and State Board of Education have a history of soliciting community and stakeholder input for their priorities, standards, guidance, and policies. Notably, Ohio's strategic plan for education, Each Child, Our Future, was developed by more than 150 Ohio-based partners in education with feedback from more than 1,200 Ohioans – including lawmakers, students, parents, educators, administrators, higher education experts, community members, and business representatives. Moreover, the State Board of Education's monthly meetings are public and provide opportunities for public comment on both agenda and non-voting items discussed, offering a venue for Ohioans to elevate local needs and opportunities to address issues they are experiencing in their districts and communities.

Ohio's students, their families, and communities deserve this type of intentional collaboration, transparency, and public oversight and accountability to be modeled moving forward with all decisions that impact them, our state's education system, and its strategic priorities for student success.

However, HB 12 would make democratic public participation and input more difficult. While many of the same educational issues and challenges exist in communities across the state – regional differences and local context must be duly considered in all educational decisions. **That is why local representation at the state level is so important.** Each of Ohio's 11 elected



members of the State Board of Education represent one of 11 districts across the state, and these members are responsible for representing each at the state-level in ways that are responsive to and understanding of their unique local values, resources, and needs. Yet, if passed, HB 12 would strip local representation away from Ohio voters, diluting the voices of local communities in state level policy. It would shift the lion's share of educational functions and responsibilities from the elected and appointed members of the State Board of Education to the oversight of a Governor-appointed cabinet-level agency – which would essentially allow for decision-making behind closed doors. This would undermine the will of voters and Ohio taxpayers, making education decision-making more partisan overall to the detriment of what is supposed to be a nonpartisan education system to benefit all students.

Lastly, in deliberating this bill, we urge you to consider the question: what is the purpose of education? Is the primary aim of education to create workers who fit neatly in our economic infrastructure or to prepare people to be well-rounded citizens who contribute to their community in a variety of ways? While we absolutely support greater accessibility of career technical education (CTE) and the specializations students need post-graduation to thrive, we do share the concerns of our partners that the priorities driving SB 1 may be business-centered first and student-centered second.

Our students lose when educational policies and priorities do not appropriately balance between and ensure access to both career readiness and the liberal arts – the freedom to be imaginative and explorative in writing, understanding our history, the fine arts, and music. Our society loses, too, when we prioritize what our economy might require of our youth in their future careers, rather than what our youth require of our economy to be innovative and forward-thinking.

I think 19th century writer and women's right advocate, Margaret Fuller, said it best and in a way we can all learn from today. In response to education for women that was driven to prepare them solely to be wives and mothers, she wrote: "A being of infinite scope must not be treated with an exclusive view to any one relation. ... Give the soul free course... and the being will be fit for any and every relation to which it may be called."

Ensuring educational content aligns with industry demands and prepares students for the world of work should not come at the expense of a well-rounded education that students deserve. We can support a vision for Ohio education that ensures space and access to both. And we do not need HB 12 to do it.

We urge you to reject HB 12. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Ohio's children and youth.