

Thank you, Chairman Bird, ranking member Robinson, members of the Education committee.

My name is Tom Jackson, I am an elected member of the State Board of Education in district 10, representing over 1 million Ohioans from Geauga, Summit and Cuyahoga counties. I was sworn into office for the first time, 2 months ago.

I was elected to serve under the current independent operational model of the State Board of Education and the Department of Education and, therefore, I'm here today to speak in opposition to the legislative overreach and undemocratic action outlined in House Bill 12.

The voters spoke to educational independence from the Legislative & the Executive branch and passed a citizen-led constitutional amendment establishing an independent State Board of Education and removed educational control from the Executive branch. This is settled business. But in fairness, if you'd like to challenge the citizens on that, the legislature should have the courage to ask the citizens to change the state constitution.

If you're concerned about accountability, I would encourage you to hold all recipients of public funds to the same financial disclosure and oversight that you have established for public schools. Public school systems are accountable to students, parents, local property taxpayers, state Sunshine Laws, open books & financial disclosures, and Department of Education oversight. Yet, the other OH school systems that receive public funds, whether charter, religious, private or homeschooled are not held to the same standards and therefore unaccountable. All of this set up by the legislature and not enshrined in the state constitution.

If you're concerned about the educational outcomes of our students and how our educational systems benefit Ohio's children, more bureaucracy is not the answer. Having politicians run our schools instead of education professionals and locally elected representatives is not the answer.

Just because you don't agree with Ohio's Strategic Plan for Education, you still have a duty to uphold the work of the 100's of people and the 1000's of hours that went into creating it. You should be focused on the plan outcomes and put your energy into achieving those goals. The Strategic plan can be found on the department of Education website.

I represent over 1M Ohioans. I have 46 school districts. The people in my district are not asking for a take over the Ohio Department of Education by the Legislature.

What they are asking for is help with the teacher shortage, bus driver shortage, the funding shortage. Why waste time holding these hearings and creating a new bureaucracy but not addressing the current problems?

In my area and I'm sure in others, my constituents learn in school buildings that are over 100 years old with no air conditioning and even in a wealthy district like Rep Robinson's own Solon Ohio, the high school has systems so old that if they break down, there's no parts or people to fix them. The sponsors of this bill claim significant problems with our educational system and yet you put 100's of millions of dollars into a Rainy-day fund. It's the rain that's leaking into our old school buildings and destroying the facilities.

Ohioans know that public services and public education can and should function independently, they know that their local mayor doesn't run the local schools. Most people wouldn't ask education leaders to run the political system, why have political leaders run your education system.

25 years ago, Ohio's educational system was ranked in the top 5 nationally, now we're in the bottom 20. Ohio could be a leader in education, but its leaders have chosen not to. HB12 is not an answer and I hope you will oppose this bill.

Thank you.