

Ohio Senate Education Committee - Feb 21, 2023 – Linda Striefsky, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

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I am Linda Striefsky, testifying against Senate Bill 1. My children attended Ohio public schools. We could afford private schools, but we chose public schools because we understood the value of a public school education. Our children received an excellent education.

Under Senate Bill 1, the re-named Department of Education and Workforce would take over most of the job of the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. An appointee of the Governor would lead this new system. This contrasts with voters electing the State Board of Education, which in turn selects a State Superintendent.

I have several points to make, but we can't ignore the elephant in the room: School funding in Ohio is still broken. The many bills introduced recently about education, including to expand vouchers, are distracting the Legislature from its job, which is to fix school funding in Ohio. We are here to talk about SB 1, but fixing school funding should have been priority one for over 20 years. While the Cupp-Patterson plan was a start, the bills and budgets this year don't yet tell us how the Legislature will finish that job.

My other main points are that SB 1 is government overreach. It ignores traditional local control over public schools. It also tries to distract voters and business leaders with labeling about workforce development, while failing to offer real solutions to any deficiency in workforce development.

As to overreach, SB 1 is tantamount to replacing the Department of Education with a centralized, Governor-controlled organization. We have seen the experiments in state take overs of schools, such as in Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland. That did not solve the problems. Again, can we just get the fair funding in place, please, and let the teachers and administrators do their jobs?

As to local control, this relates to several elements of the foundation of our democracy in the US. I think we all agree that our public education system in Ohio is critically important to the future of our children. For one thing, all of our children are welcome in public schools, whatever their needs or financial status. Our national and Ohio founding fathers recognized the importance of universal public education as a fundamental building block for our democracy.

Another building block is our tradition of local control of public schools, with an elected school board and a professional administrator. The state school board and superintendent structure mirrors that, quite appropriately. We don't need to change that. Isn't the voter in the best position to inform education choices for his or her community? Given all of the Republican support for parental choice, why is the attitude different when it comes to

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