



8221 Auburn Road
Painesville, OH, 44077
440.350.2563, www.escw.org
Superintendent, Jennifer Felker

**Senate Finance Committee
HB 33 Testimony**

**Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve, Geauga and Lake Counties
Profile Information**

May 31, 2021

The Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve (ESCWR) plays a crucial role in enhancing education within Geauga and Lake counties, situated near Cleveland, Ohio. With a steadfast commitment to our county, region, and state, we strive to serve the students and staff of local exempted village, city school districts, and joint vocational schools. As the educational landscape in Ohio undergoes rapid evolution, we understand the significance of adaptability, innovation, and dynamic leadership.

At ESCWR, we are dedicated to meeting the present and future needs of our region. Our primary focus lies in the development of impactful programs and the recruitment of exceptional personnel who can provide services that positively influence instruction and enhance student achievement throughout the area.

Driven by a vision of excellence, the ESC of the Western Reserve continuously seeks to deliver innovative programming and high-quality services that support and promote student achievement across all educational communities in our region and state.

Our aspiration is for the ESC of the Western Reserve to be acknowledged as a premier educational service center, renowned for delivering personalized services that inspire and empower student growth while fostering staff development in educational communities throughout Ohio.



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Jennifer Felker, Superintendent ESCWR**

May 31, 2021

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on House Bill (HB) 33.

I am Jennifer Felker, etc serving as the Superintendent of the Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve supporting Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, and Portage counties. Our Educational Service Center is funded to support 15,837 students in rural, suburban, and urban school districts. However, our ESC provides services to over 40,000 additional students in Northeast Ohio. With over 20 years of experience leading educational service centers, I am also the President-Elect for the Ohio Educational Service Center Association. Today I am here to request your support for an amendment to HB 33 that would update educational service center (ESC) funding consistent with all other K-12 educational entities. The amendment would benefit all educational service centers in Ohio and the districts, schools, and students they serve.

Educational Service Centers in Ohio have been instrumental in delivering high quality instructional materials supports, professional development for educators, special education and preschool consortium programs, student and family resource centers, providing numerous staff for our schools, transportation coordination, leadership consulting, school board member training, executive searches, business development supports, and being a fiscal agent for numerous entities. In addition, ESCs have been called upon by the state over the last few years for delivering the following: Extended learning programming and services for students, structured literacy and math coaching, before and after school tutoring, summer educational programs, and our ESC has distributed over 5 million in Emergency Assistance to Nonpublic Schools. This has allowed us to significantly increase services to nonpublic schools.

In January 2020 the ESC of the Western Reserve was formed by consolidating both Geauga and Lake county Educational Service Centers. This was primarily an attempt to create a larger ESC in order to provide a broader range of services to our schools and to be more cost effective. Unfortunately, both ESCs at the time were struggling financially and there were concerns regarding long term sustainability. I am proud of the ESC of the Western Reserve and the commitment our Governing Board and staff have



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made to transform our organization in just a few short years. Our ESC is needed by our schools and community. We are often the first called upon to assist in coordinating numerous local, county, and state initiatives. However, since 2002 when I was first hired as an ESC Supervisor of Special Education we were funded at a higher per pupil cost rate than we are today. Although our funding has decreased, ESCs are now called upon more now than ever. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and after to offer crucial extended learning opportunities for students. Many of these requests have required significant ESC staffing in order to commit which have not been funded. To meet the needs of districts and schools we serve, ESCs have had to hire numerous staff positions over the past few years, such as math and literacy coaches, tutors, school administrators, regional coordinators, et al. that are currently grant funded. For every \$1 ESCs receive in the state operating support, they generate \$7.97 in combined savings and leveraged grants on behalf of districts and the state. In 2022, ESCs saved school districts over \$77 million in 5 core service areas when compared to the costs of districts providing the services themselves or using another private, third-party provider. We need funding support for long term sustainability and to continue offering these essential educational supports to our students, schools, families, and communities.

As a former State Associate Superintendent for the Ohio Department of Education, I am well acquainted with the legislative process and the demands placed upon public positions. I kindly request that you carefully consider the recommended amendments to HB 33 showing support for ESCs and recognizing our indispensable role in Ohio's education support system. There is value in ESCs existing and being resourced properly; it allows for "turn key" operating of key statewide initiatives.

Chair Dolan and esteemed members of the committee, I sincerely appreciate your time and attention, I am available to address any questions you may have at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer A. Felker, Superintendent

Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve