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Superintendent, Jennifer Felker

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**Senate Finance Committee  
HB 33 Testimony**

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

**June 8, 2023**

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 villages, 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.

**Senate Finance Committee  
HB 33 Testimony**

**Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve, Geauga and Lake Counties  
Jennifer Felker, Superintendent ESCWR**

**June 8, 2023**

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

My name is Jennifer Felker and I serve as the Superintendent of the Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve in Geauga and Lake counties. Our Educational Service Center provides educational services and programs to approximately 15,600 students in rural, suburban, and urban school districts. I have spent over 20 years of my career leading educational service centers and I am currently President Elect for the Ohio Educational Service Center Association. I am asking for support for an amendment to H.B. 33 that would update educational service center (ESC) funding consistent with all other K-12 educational entities. The requested 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 supporting ODE initiatives including quick turnaround supports for schools and districts including Structured Literacy, Dyslexia Facilitator Trainings per Dyslexia Support Laws, the expansion of High School Math Alternative Pathways, implementation of High Quality Instructional Materials across all content areas, Regional Data Leads, Family and Community Parent Liaisons, Ohio Personalized Learning Network and Tutor Ohio Kids. In Lake and Geauga counties, our Literacy Specialists have supported over 1500 teachers with Structured Literacy and Science of Reading. In addition, 10 of our Curriculum consultants will be supporting the Northeast Ohio region of the state to further the work of High Quality Instructional Materials.

ESCs were responsible for the distribution of over 255 million dollars of EANS and ARP EANS funds to nonpublic schools across the state of Ohio. ESCs have supported nonpublic schools at no cost Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) and low cost professional development across all content areas: literacy, math, English Language Learner, Gifted, STEAM integration, and Integrated Student Supports. In addition, ESCs have customized professional development support for non-public schools in the areas of accreditation, hiring services, including substitute teachers.

We are often the first called upon to assist in coordinating numerous local, county, and state initiatives and we are the first to respond during crises such as student suicide attempts, prevention education, and mental health support services. In addition, we offer immediate assistance at all hours regarding resources and referral when families of students are in crisis with lack of basic resources—food, shelter, and transportation. All of these help to mitigate our state’s chronic absenteeism which multiplied after the COVID pandemic.

In response to the COVID pandemic, ESCs across the state of Ohio established vaccination clinics, distributed Personal Protection Equipment (PPE supplies), offered online learning support and options for students and families and provided direct crisis response support to families in need through case management services.

Despite decreases in funding, ESCs are called upon more now than ever. 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 officials. I kindly request that you carefully consider the recommended amendments to HB33, showing support for ESCs and recognizing our indispensable role in Ohio's education support system.

Chair Dolan and esteemed members of the committee, I sincerely appreciate your time and attention. I am available to address any questions should they arise.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer A. Felker, Superintendent

Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve