



children's defense fund ohio

Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

SB 178 - Opponent Testimony

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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee of the Ohio Senate, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to SB 178.

My name is Alison Paxson, and I am a Senior Policy Associate for the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. Born out of the civil rights movement, with more than four decades of advocacy behind us, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness.

As an organization, 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. We are therefore here on behalf of Ohio's nearly 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.

We reject this bill, because Ohio's students deserve any sweeping changes to our state's public education system to be considered carefully with ample opportunities for stakeholder input in a transparent and extensive review process. Overhauling the responsibilities of the Ohio State Board of Education, Superintendent for Public Instruction, and Ohio Department of Education is not a simple undertaking that can reasonably or acceptably be considered in the short timeframe that lame duck session offers. Necessary examination of best practices, data and research collection, and intentional engagement with schools and families cannot be accomplished through a fast-tracked bill and would not do justice to what our students' need from those making decisions on their behalf.

The Ohio Department of Education and State Board of Education, while not without needed improvements, have a history of soliciting community and stakeholder input for its priorities, standards, guidance, and policies. Notably, Ohio's strategic plan for education, *Each Child, Our Future*, approved by the State Board of Education in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education was developed by more than 150 Ohio-based partners in education with feedback from more than 1,350 Ohioans –

students, parents, educators, school districts, higher education experts, community members, business representatives, and more stakeholders. Moreover, State Board of Education meetings are public and have opportunities for public comment on both agenda and non-voting items discussed.

Ohio's students deserve this type of intentional collaboration, transparency, and public oversight and accountability to be modeled moving forward with all decisions that could drastically restructure their education system and its priorities. However, by shifting 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 the Governor's office, SB 178 would make democratic participation in key educational decisions more difficult. Giving executive management to the Governor's office would undermine the will of voters and Ohio taxpayers and what they want to see from our state's education system, making education decision-making more partisan overall to the detriment of what is supposed to be a nonpartisan education system to benefit all students. This makes the rushed timing of this bill with insufficient opportunities for review and input indisputably suspect, particularly given that it is on the heels of a 2022 midterm election that seated three new elected members who shift the partisan makeup of the Board's members. The rushed process for this bill reeks of a politically motivated power grab – one that has no place in our education system and our democracy.

Bottom line: Ohio student well-being is inextricably tied to the well-being of our democratic processes. Circumventing the will of voters through a quick and blatant attempt to consolidate power into a single party harms Ohio students and we urge you to reject SB 178 in this committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.