



**House Government Accountability and Oversight
HB 512 Opposition Testimony
Ohio School Boards Association
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio Association of School Business Officials
March 7, 2018**

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde and members of the Committee. My name is Barbara Shaner, Advocacy Specialist for the Ohio Association of School Business Officials (OASBO). Joining me today for this testimony and in answering your questions are Jennifer Hogue, Director of Legislative Services for the Ohio School Boards Association and Thomas Ash, Director of Governmental Relations for the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA).

Our three organizations represent public school district boards of education, superintendents, treasurers/CFOs, business managers and other school business officials from around the state. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today to express our opposition to HB 512 on behalf of our members.

Important to the members of our three organization is the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE's) service and assistance to the 700-plus school districts, educational service centers and joint vocational school districts. The function of public school districts is vastly different from the institutions served by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE). Pre-kindergarten through 12th grade (PK-12) students come to school with much different circumstances than those of higher education institutions. Methods of teaching and even the culture of a K-12 system are also very different than those in higher education. Moving to a model where the unique needs of K-12th grade students could be lost within an expanded bureaucracy causes us great concern.

Another important service to school districts is the implementation of Ohio's complicated school-funding system. It is difficult to imagine how merging these three agencies will improve that process.

ODE is also responsible for carrying out the public education policy changes and laws passed every year by the Ohio General Assembly. In recent years, there have been constant, significant changes to Ohio's education public policy, presenting significant implementation challenges for ODE staff and our school districts. ODE's implementation of so many changes can result in frustration by our members. ODE is not without its shortcomings, but our experience in working with department staff to resolve issues and questions from the field is typically very positive.

Proponents have attempted to direct all the focus for HB 512 on improving Ohio's workforce preparation. In reality, K-12 public education is much more complicated. Ohio's students must be equipped with the skills to become lifelong learners. As the supporters of HB 512 have pointed out, the workforce needs of Ohio's businesses are ever-changing. There is much more to preparing students to be responsible and productive citizens than simply talking about job readiness. ODE and Ohio's K-12 education system are

uniquely situated to focus on the needs of students and preparing them for success, no matter what career paths they choose.

Jennifer Hogue will now continue our testimony.

HB 512 requires the director of the newly created agency to appoint two assistant directors – one with oversight of higher education policy and one with oversight of the office of workforce transformation. While the bill allows the director to appoint other assistant directors “as the director determines necessary,” there is no mention of the need for a director of K-12 education policy. This is alarming, particularly given our concern about K-12 education being lost in the new bureaucracy.

HB 512 would undermine the role and authority of the elected members of the State Board of Education. By stripping it of all but its regulatory role, the board would no longer be acting in any significant way on behalf of the citizens the members represent. At the core of our existence is the belief that education in Ohio will be at its best when the interests of the people are served through publicly elected boards.

Supporters of HB 512 have expressed frustration over the cumbersome policymaking process utilized by the State Board of Education. However, as stakeholders in the decisions and recommendations made by the board, we strongly support and participate in the current process. This includes public committee discussions, public hearings and other opportunities to provide valuable input. The state board process acts in the open with many observers and stakeholders weighing in. This opportunity for stakeholder input and participation will be lost in the new bureaucracy.

In addition to losing these important processes, HB 512 would move decisions about important topics such as setting the state’s learning standards, graduation requirements for students and school district report cards to a politically appointed staff as opposed to the current process that includes many opportunities for public input.

Under the proposed legislation, all policymaking would be accomplished through one bureaucratic agency. Rather than an open, deliberative and transparent process, HB 512 simply gives the executive branch of government a significant amount of new, independent power and minimizes the role of the public and stakeholders in the process.

Further, the proposal to rely heavily on the executive branch of government would create uncertainty for school districts when the office holder changes. Major swings in education policy could occur as often as every four years if a new governor is elected.

While more than 2,400 pages long, much of HB 512 simply changes all the current roles and responsibilities of the Ohio Department of Higher Education and the Ohio Department of Education in the Ohio Revised Code to a responsibility of the proposed Ohio Department of Learning and Achievement. There is no indication in the bill for how the creation of one massive agency will result in the achievement of the many stated goals for HB 512.

Proponents have claimed that HB 512 will ensure that decisions about degrees and programs will no longer be made in a vacuum, re-engineer Ohio’s operating platform for continuous learning, provide an easier way for stakeholders to communicate with policymakers, make retraining programs easier to navigate, create a culture of continuous learning and allow for swift adjustment to the changing workforce needs. However, there is nothing in this bill that enacts these changes.

I will now turn the testimony over to Tom Ash.

If better cooperation among these three departments is desired, we urge lawmakers to look for less drastic measures that do not take away ODE's focus on serving Ohio's public school districts and their students. There are numerous examples where these organizations have collaborated successfully in the past, and there is no reason to think those examples cannot be extended to other areas of work.

One missed opportunity for better coordination over the past six years is the absence of a seat on the Office of Workforce Transformation executive workforce board for the state superintendent of public instruction or ODE. Even so, ODE has proactively worked to promote information to school districts and students about OhioMeansJobs. ODE took the lead in developing the OhioMeansJobs readiness seal as directed by the legislature in the HB 49, the most recent biennial budget bill. Rolled out in December 2017, this new option is first available to the class of 2018.

ODE regularly cooperates with the ODHE and the office of workforce transformation in promoting workforce training and retraining programs. A good example of this is the involvement of the three agencies in the promotion and support for the Aspire program for adult learners. This program falls under the direction of ODHE; however, ODE and the office of workforce transformation support and assist in its success.

It should be noted that two of the three agencies proposed to be abolished are currently under the control of the governor's office, and the third (the Ohio Department of Education (ODE)) has a number of gubernatorial appointees to its board. We think solving problems, such as the perceived lack of communication among the three entities, citizens unprepared for the workforce and teachers lacking training to properly prepare students for the jobs available, could effectively be addressed under the current system.

Conversely, we believe that creating a new, massive bureaucracy with a single director will not ensure that the stated goals for HB 512 will be achieved. We also believe that under Superintendent of Public Instruction Paolo DeMaria, ODE has shown a commitment to working through the problems that schools face. We urge you to reject HB 512.

Thank you for considering our testimony. We will be happy to address your questions.