



Testimony to Senate Education Committee

Senate Bill 311 – Opponent

April 14, 2026

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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Jeff Talbert. I am the Co-Chair of The Ohio 8 Coalition and the Superintendent of Canton City Schools. I appreciate the chance to provide testimony on behalf of our Coalition as an Opponent to Senate Bill 311, in particular the school property, school board, and Superintendent licensure provisions.

School Property

The existing mandate of forced sale of school property does not consider ongoing and typical realities of operating a school district including the impact and implications of the following:

1. Short- and long-term master facility plans and swing space for construction activity and planning.
 - Such plans should exempt any underenrolled facilities that are a part of such plans
2. Space for school district administration.
 - Buildings best utilized for administrators and related programming should be exempt.
3. Buildings with special equipment and programming including those that offer performing arts, medically fragile student services, students on the autism spectrum; school-based health services, and early learning programming have specific space needs.
 - Presently career tech buildings are exempt from existing closure mandates. Other programming that is key to student success and parent preferences must not be forgotten and should be exempt.
4. Rejects the stated preferences of local residents and voters that have been asked to decide on the use or sale of school property or facilities.
 - Any building impacted by voter approved permeant improvement levies and bond issues should be exempt. Additionally, if there are community development plans that provide a greater good to the region from an economic impact perspective, we need the flexibility to plan around that. If this law was in place during the original planning for the Football Hall of Fame Village, we would have been forced to sell an elementary school building to a charter school instead of leveraging the land for the broader project.

The Ohio 8 Coalition is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from 1 the following Ohio urban school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Lorain, Toledo, and Youngstown.

5. Forces the sale of that property to a pre-determined list of organizations instead of a third party that could pay at or above market price.
 - This provision has the potential to force districts to sell school property below market value and runs counter to what is best for a local district's ability to:
 - Manage the community's investment in us but also to reinvest the proceeds of a sale back into the district
 - Leverage buildings and or parcels of land that can help spur larger economic development projects (which we are faced with at this very moment).

With regard to school property, we ask that you remember the following:

1. Under enrollment does not mean a building is being underutilized and should not automatically mandate closure;
2. The arbitrary use of "60% enrollment" to trigger closure and forced sale of buildings as such artificial thresholds do not reflect the reality of how buildings are utilized nor how districts plan for their use in the short and long term; and
3. When it comes to the use, sale and reinvestment of school facilities and property, local school districts and their community members are the best and most knowledgeable decision makers.

School Board and Superintendent Licensure

Similar to the testimony of our colleagues (BASA, OSBA, and the Alliance) the Ohio 8 Coalition has concerns with provisions in SB 311 that eliminate a school board's qualified immunity and allow the Ohio State Board of Education to revoke a superintendent's license for purposefully violating the law. As it relates to student transportation, we believe these punitive measures are counterproductive. We respectfully request the removal of these provisions and recommend instead that the General Assembly consider broader, systemic solutions, such as those that the Ohio 8 Coalition has testified to for several budget cycles as well as recommendations identified by the Student Transportation Workgroup related to clearer definition of rule and Ohio Revised code of transportation 'impracticality'.

The Ohio 8 Coalition is also supportive of the SB 311's improvements made to public school district governance including:

- Expanded timelines and improved processes to fill school board vacancies.
- Streamlined RAPBACK notifications across all types of schools.

The Ohio 8 Coalition would like to thank the committee for the consideration of our testimony. I am happy to answer any questions and am happy to provide you with insight about how Canton City Schools you might have. Thank you.

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