

**Testimony of Carol Caruso
Senior Vice President
Greater Cleveland Partnership**

In Support of House Bill 153

Monday, May 2, 2011

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. On behalf of the members of the Greater Cleveland Partnership, please accept my thanks for this opportunity to speak to you in support of House Bill 153. The Greater Cleveland Partnership is a membership organization based in Northeast Ohio dedicated to economic development and creating a positive business environment for the businesses and citizens in the eight counties served by our organization.

The Greater Cleveland Partnership is also a member of a coalition that consists of Ohio's eight metropolitan chambers of commerce and the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. Over the past two years, we have been working together to address our state's fiscal crisis and bring forward recommendations we believe will create a stronger, more efficient government. Last December, we released a report, *Redesigning Ohio: Transforming Government Into a 21st Century Institution*, that contained several specific recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly and the Administration. We are very gratified that House Bill 153 reflects many of these recommendations. Prison and sentencing reform, local government reform, and changes in the way in which we think about purchasing services and health insurance are just a few of those areas. My colleagues have and will be speaking about these reforms throughout this legislative process.

Today, I would like to focus on another important part of House Bill 153 that was not part of *Redesigning Ohio*, but is closely aligned with work we have undertaken with a broad coalition of business leaders, educators, and civic organizations – education reform. The Cleveland Foundation, Fordham Foundation, Gund Foundation and others have all been active participants in this work.

Every child deserves the chance to succeed. Unfortunately, Ohio's K-12 educational system does not give all children that opportunity. House Bill 153 contains important educational reforms to provide Ohio students the 21st century education they need.

Most people know that urban schools in high-poverty neighborhoods are some of the toughest places to teach and to learn, though some are beginning to show results. What many people don't realize is that even some schools rated excellent are not adequately preparing students for higher education and high-skill, technically advanced

blue collar jobs. An “excellent” school district can still fail 20 percent of its students. In a district that received the state’s highest rating, 81 percent of the students needed remedial work when they started college.¹

While Ohio schools go time and again to the ballot to ask voters for levy support, many are not making the best possible use of the funding they have. Ohio spends more on school administration than 41 other states. But we spend less in the classroom; only three other states spend less than we do where it really counts.² If all schools followed financial best-practices, administrative costs would drop by as much as \$1.4 billion.³

House Bill 153 contains broad reform measures to make our schools competitive so our students can compete. It gives more information and more control to parents, provides ways for schools to refocus their spending on the classroom, and emphasizes student achievement above all else.

Giving Parents Information and Options

Currently, too many parents are frustrated by poor schools, limited choices, and lack of information. House Bill 153 addresses these problems.

- Parents would get more and better information through a new ranking system that will let them see exactly how their child’s school measures up. This sunshine alone will go a long way to creating pressure for improvement in all schools.
- Parents would gain the right to demand their school district fix poor-performing schools.
- Parents will have more options to choose the school their child attends. More charter schools will be able to open, and more vouchers will be available, at no additional cost to the taxpayer.

Putting Quality Teachers in Every Classroom

Ohio has many excellent teachers who work tirelessly to help students learn. House Bill 153 provides ways to retain and reward these successful educators. It also reforms several aspects of teacher employment to help ensure all classrooms are staffed by knowledgeable, effective teachers.

¹ Office of Budget and Management, Executive Budget Proposal, Book 5, pg. 8
<http://obm.ohio.gov/sectionpages/Budget/FY1213/ExecutiveBudget.aspx>

²Brachman, L, Bradley, J, and Katz B. *Restoring Prosperity: Preparing Ohio’s Communities for the Next Economy*. (2010). Greater Ohio Policy Center and the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program.

³Benson, A, and Brinker J. (2010). Benchmarking Ohio’s School Districts: Identifying districts that did not get more for their money in non-instructional spending. Ohio Smart Schools.

- It will expand the pool of motivated, highly qualified teachers by reforming antiquated licensure rules that don't correlate to student achievement. It will be easier for candidates from innovation programs such as Teach for America and the Woodrow Wilson program, as well as good teachers from other states to get a license to teach in Ohio.⁴
- When students learn more than one year's worth of material in a single school year, their teachers will earn bonuses.
- House Bill 153 eliminates seniority as the sole determinant of teacher retention, so schools can keep their best teachers based on performance. Thirty-six other states have already made this change.⁵ The system of teacher evaluation contained in this budget is absolutely essential to eliminating the seniority standard for personnel decisions.

Supporting Innovation in Education

Creating successful schools is not only possible, we know how to do it. There are many excellent schools to emulate. House Bill 153 encourages and rewards innovation in schools.

- The budget will reduce the bureaucracy associated with on-line learning and make it cheaper for schools to offer digital coursework.
- The top ten percent of Ohio's schools will be recognized for their accomplishment. Other schools will learn from their success.
- The budget allows a school or a group of schools to make an innovation proposal to the school board. Innovation Schools will gain flexibility to make local decisions free of certain administrative mandates in return for high student achievement.

Addressing Poor Schools

House Bill 153 provides mechanisms to reform or close schools that don't make the grade.

- In schools that rank in the bottom five percent in the state, teachers will have to take licensure tests.

⁴Teach for America allows recent college graduates in fields other than education to train for the classroom if they agree to work in a low-income school for two years. www.teachforamerica.org

⁵Office of Budget and Management, Executive Budget Proposal, Book 5, pg. 7
<http://obm.ohio.gov/sectionpages/Budget/FY1213/ExecutiveBudget.aspx>

- If a school ranks in the bottom five percent in the state, parents will have the right to demand changes. They will be able to insist that the school board replace staff, bring in proven leaders, or convert to a charter school.
- If a school ranks in the bottom five percent in the state for three years, it will be closed. This gives districts an incentive to act quickly to reform failing schools.
- Sponsors who have operated poor-performing charter schools in the past will not be allowed to sponsor a new school.

Prioritizing Spending

Ohio spends more than 41 other states on school administration, and less than all states but three in the classroom. Something is wrong with this picture. House Bill 153 offers schools options for saving money on administration so they can concentrate resources where they are needed: in the classroom. According to a study by the Greater Ohio Policy Center and the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, the amount of money Ohio schools spend on administration is 49 percent higher than the national average. (*Restoring Prosperity: Transforming Ohio's Communities for the Next Economy.*) We must do better. The proposals contained in House Bill 153 set the framework for improvement.

The changes this budget proposes will create a new day in Ohio education, one in which we deal forthrightly with the problems our kids face in gaining essential education, and in which we stop sweeping problems under the rug because of the influence of special interests. The budget puts students ahead of adults in the system, and that's long overdue. You are to be commended for embarking on this challenge, and we urge you to stand strong against forces protecting the inadequate status quo that is cheating our schoolchildren. You have the support of our organization and members as you do so.

Educating our children is not only an obligation we all share as citizens of Ohio, it is also the path to a stronger economy and a stronger Ohio. For this reason, education reform is one of the Greater Cleveland Partnership's highest priorities.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about this critically important issue.