

Good afternoon Chairman Readler, Co-Chairman Representative Sykes, Vice-Chair Mr. Gilbert and Committee Members; Governor Taft, Mr. Beckett, Ms. Brooks, Representative Clyde, Senator Coley, Representative Huffman, Mr. Macon, and Ms. Talley.

Thank you all for opening the doors of room 114 to begin public discussion pertaining to the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission's proposal of removing the language of "thorough and efficient" from the constitution of the state of Ohio.

My name is Maureen Reedy; I am appearing here before the committee representing concerned Ohioans as a founder of Ohio Friends of Public Education. Ohio Friends of Public Education is a statewide public education advocacy group with 5 regional groups: NWFPE, NEOFPE, SWOFPE, SCOFPE and COFPE. Our mission statement is as follows:

OFPE is a citizen-driven, non-partisan movement to inform and engage Central Ohioans, at the community level, to support and strengthen public schools.

What brings our group, Ohio Friends of Public Education here before all of you today?

To put it quite simply, we are alarmed.

We are alarmed that with the removal of the language, "thorough and efficient," from Ohio's constitution, equitable funding and sustainable supports for all Ohio's school children will slip away and with it the opportunities for our children to build secure and successful futures.

Educating, guiding, and motivating my students to build on their strengths and push through their challenges to become the best students and human beings possible has been my career and my vocation for over 30 years. I have been privileged and honored to work side-by-side with thousands of children and their parents throughout my career, in regular education classes and for children with special needs such as autism, dyslexia, cerebral palsy, anxiety disorder, depression and multiple learning disabilities.

I have also taken very seriously the responsibility of advocating for Ohio's school children on local, state and national levels as Upper Arlington's District teacher of the year and the Ohio Teacher of the Year during my tenure.

I am choosing to focus my comments this afternoon on the stated concerns of this committee that the language of "thorough and efficient" has been: "misused as a vehicle to take education decisions out of the hands of legislators and boards of education, while putting decisions into the hands of the courts, which are not well equipped to make education policy decisions."

This claim is confusing to me on many levels; as a parent, a taxpayer, a life-long educator, and as a former candidate for the Ohio House of Representatives in the last election cycle.

I will attempt to condense our concerns here for the committee.

First and foremost, we are parents, taxpayers, concerned professionals, community members and educators committed to the academic success and well being of Ohio's school children. We expect our state legislators to support equitable educational opportunities not only for our own children, but for all of Ohio's children.

We expect a wise allocation of our hard-earned public tax dollars for supporting our children's academic progress and social/emotional stability in school, regardless of ability levels, supports and special needs.

This simply is not the state of affairs in the Ohio statehouse today. Whatever the linguistics may be, "thorough and efficient," does not describe the current educational funding practices and policy trends coming out of Ohio's Statehouse.

Instead, our concurrent state legislatures have continued to fuel the two decade trend of divesting in Ohio's higher performing public schools, while significantly increasing vital tax dollars to expand Ohio's lower performing charter school system.

Recycled, unfunded state mandates, such as the 3rd grade reading guarantee, unsupported by educational research, continue to be rubber stamped for Ohio's school children as a simple solution to the very complex issues of poverty, economic and environmental deprivation.

High stakes tests are being ramped up, putting a huge financial strain on our local school districts. Unbelievably, our youngest children are now facing state mandated standardized testing in music, art and physical education.

Test-driven curriculum is zapping the curiosity and joy from classrooms and stress related diagnoses of anxiety and depression are on the rise for our children today. School districts and homeowners are more cash strapped than ever, with deep state funding cuts to local government and education funding. Increased costs for high stakes testing, unfunded state mandated programs and pay-to-play, have resulted in the highest number of school levies on the ballot statewide in decades.

I would argue here today, that never before in our history, has our public education system needed the checks and balances system in our courts more urgently than we do today.

For decades, when researching, role playing, and re-enacting events in American History, it has not been difficult for young children in my classroom to understand

why a checks and balances system was built into our constitution to protect citizens from an over reach of power by one branch of government.

Although we teach young children the idealistic version of democracy, we know that ideological differences, pay to play politics and one party positioning for power over another often dictate legislative decisions and compromise the true intent of a representative government.

When districts are strategically gerrymandered heavily in favor of one political party, a true representative government is impossible to elect. Believe me, no one knows that more viscerally than I do, having experienced full throttle, the big bucks political engine revved up against my candidacy for a seat in the Ohio House in the last election cycle.

And so, back to the starting line that brings us together here today. Is it really in the best interest of Ohio's school children to leave the crucial decisions of legislating fair and equitable education funding and policy to our state legislature, unbridled and unchecked?

That train has already left the station, and it's track record is out there in the public eye, for all to see.

Instead of adhering to the "check and balances" decision by Ohio's Supreme Court in multiple school funding rulings, our legislature has been writing blank checks worth ten billion dollars to an ineffective charter school system for two decades.

A graduation rate of 30 – 40% for Ohio's charters, which is less than one-half of our public school graduation rate of 81.5% is not a "thorough" and "efficient" use of our taxpayer dollars. 87% of charter school students attending a school that is rated a D or F is not a "thorough" and "efficient" use of billions of taxpayer dollars.

Multi-million dollar salaries to for-profit charter school CEOs, who increase class sizes and plug students in on-line to reduce brick and mortar fees, use millions of our tax dollars each year to advertise and recruit students, and hire non-certified teachers is not a "thorough" and "efficient" use of taxpayer dollars.

When the FBI investigates charter school operations and record numbers of Ohio's charter schools are closing their doors mid-year the words "thorough and efficient" do not come to mind.

When thousands of students "ping-pong" back and forth from their neighborhood public school to a charter school and back to their public school, our children not only fall behind academically but lose their sense of connection and belonging to the classroom and school community. Losing millions of dollars a year to shuttered charter school operators who pocket profits based on a "scrubbed" student data

count, is not a “thorough” and “efficient” use of taxpayer dollars.

If there is a semantical argument for the removal of the language “thorough and efficient” from our state’s constitution, let’s replace it with more specific language that protects the fundamental right for our children to have equal access to a free and equitable public education system that accepts all children and invests every dollar back into the instruction, supports and resources our children need to succeed in school.

We are parents, business owners, city council members, teachers, principals, and superintendents.

We are stay-at-home moms and dads, nurses, accountants, lawyers, doctors and school board members.

We are on a mission as a concerned community joining together for our children today.

We believe that educating our children to become the best students and human beings possible, to be happy, inspired, and motivated in life should not be political.

We believe it is the fundamental charge we have as adults in a democratic society, to help our children build successful, secure futures while fully enjoying their childhood. Profiteering off of our children turns their education into a political minefield where kids are the victims. It is as simple, and as tragic, as that.

In the words of John F. Kennedy: “Let us not seek the Republican answer, or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future.”

We, the members of Ohio Friends of Public Education, believe it is time to stand up together, as a community; for our children, their futures and the future of public education in the state of Ohio today.

Thank you very much for your time and attention this afternoon. I welcome any questions or comments you may have.

Maureen Reedy
Co-Founder, Ohio Friends of Public Education
Founder, Central Ohio Friends of Public Education

614-581-6690 / Maureen.reedy@gmail.com



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