

OEA Legislative Watch

February 18, 2011

Do you know that the political process affects virtually everything in your school day?

Take action — Become an OEA Member Lobbyist

Questions?

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Senate Bill 5 Receives Proponent and Opponent Testimony in Second and Third Hearings in Senate Insurance, Commerce & Labor Committee. POSSIBLE VOTE NEXT WEEK!

Thousands of public employees and their supporters gathered at the Ohio Statehouse on Tuesday, February 15 and Thursday, February 17 to rally in opposition to Senate Bill 5, legislation that would decimate collective bargaining in Ohio. Senate Bill 5 eliminates collective bargaining for state employees and employees of state institutions of higher education. While it technically retains collective bargaining for K-12 school employees, it essentially eliminates bargaining on a vast array of issues, including salary, health benefits and numerous working conditions. It is collective bargaining "in name only."

Numerous OEA members waited hours in committee on Thursday in order to have their voice heard and deliver OPPOSITION testimony to Senate Bill 5. OEA Vice President Bill Leibensperger delivered testimony on behalf of the Association. He was joined by the following OEA members who also provided testimony:

- Tim Dove, Worthington Education Association, 2011 Teacher of the Year
- Brenda Crouse, Sherry Linkonk, John Russo and Michael Glonek from Youngstown State University
- Phil Hayes and Karen Andermills from the Columbus Education Association
- Joy Bock, a Republican educator from Groveport Madison Local School District

One amendment was accepted by the committee, which was purported to fix language in the bill prohibiting collective bargaining on teacher salaries. HOWEVER, other language in the bill still essentially prohibits collective bargaining regarding wages, hours, and terms and conditions of employment for K-12 school employees.

As of Friday afternoon February 18, the schedule for Senate Bill 5 hearings in the Senate Insurance, Commerce & Labor Committee has not been released. The OEA will send this information out as soon it is released. More OEA members are expected to testify in committee next week.

To take action on Senate Bill 5 go to http://aces.ohea.org.

House Bill 21 Creates a Licensure Pathway for Teach for America Participants; Provisions Opposed by the OEA Removed from the Bill

A substitute bill for House Bill 21 (R-Combs) was accepted by the House Education Committee this week. The substitute bill removed provisions opposed by the OEA, which would have required the use of value-added in licensure eligibility and model evaluations, as well as lifting the charter e-school moratorium. The bill keeps language providing a pathway for Teach for America (TFA) participants to gain licensure in Ohio. Consistent with OEA advocacy, the substitute bill significantly increases quality standards for TFA participants entering the teaching profession and requires these individuals to go through the resident educator program, as opposed to automatically receive a professional license. The OEA expects the value-added and charter e-school proposals to resurface.

The TFA language in the substitute bill grants individuals in the TFA program a resident educator license, instead of a professional license, if they 1) hold a bachelor's degree; 2) maintain at least a 2.5 G.P.A.; 3) have passed a subject area examination prescribed by the State Board of Education; and 4) have successfully completed the TFA summer training institute. The OEA supports this amendment as a significant improvement. Under the amendment, TFA participants will not be able to advance to a five-year professional license until they have successfully completed the resident educator program (mentoring, formative assessment, etc.), which provide them support and establish higher quality standards.

Senate Bill 81 (R-Cates) has similar provisions to House Bill 21 for creating a pathway to licensure for Teach for America participants. OEA will be monitoring this bill.

House Bill 30 (Ends Universal All-Day Kindergarten Commitment; Repeals Important Education Reforms) Passes Ohio House of Representative on Party-Line Vote

The OEA opposes House Bill 30 (R-Gardner), which would eliminate the requirement that all Ohio school districts implement all-day Kindergarten, repeal a number of recent education reforms, such as the School Funding Advisory Council, the Closing the Achievement Gap Initiative, Family and Civic Engagement Teams and class-size requirement of 15 students per teacher in Kindergarten through third grade. House Bill 30 passed the House by a 59-36 margin on a party-line vote.

Three amendments supported by the OEA were offered by Democrats on the House floor but voted down by Republicans: 1) continuation of a School Funding Advisory Council; 2) maintaining the Closing the Achievement Gap Initiative, Family and Civic Engagement Teams and class-size requirement of 15 students per teacher in Kindergarten through third grade; and 3) extending the all-day Kindergarten waiver system and allowing districts to continue charging fees to provide all-day Kindergarten.

The OEA provided opponent testimony on House Bill 30 while it was in the House Education Committee. In addition, Kindergarten teacher and OEA member, Bobbi Jo Johnson, testified in opposition to the bill. She stated that students come to school today "lacking the skills that used to be taught at home. All-day kindergarten should be available to all students."

Senate Bill 9 (R-Manning) has similar content to House Bill 30 and also will be opposed by the OEA.

Public Testimony to Begin on Pension Legislation

On the evening of Tuesday, February 22, 2011, members will have their first opportunity to testify on proposed legislation to make changes to pension benefits offered by the state retirement systems. **The hearing will be held at 7:00 p.m. in Room 313 of the Statehouse.**

House Bill 69, sponsored by Representative Lynn Wachtmann (R-Napoleon), is scheduled for several weeks of hearings before the House Retirement and Pensions Subcommittee. Currently, the bill is a "placeholder" in that it does not incorporate recent proposed changes to retirement benefits of STRS that were directed by the legislature and approved by the STRS Board in January.

OEA recognizes the need for changes in order to improve the long-term solvency of the pension plans and is supportive of current proposals offered by SERS and OPERS. However, OEA opposes the recent changes proposed by STRS because the benefit reductions go too far, place too great a burden on active teachers and do not provide for the necessary phase-in for teachers nearing the end of their teaching career.

To take action on proposed pension reform visit www.aces.ohea.org

The Subcommittee has announced its schedule for the coming weeks. There will be opportunities for public testimony on the proposed changes to STRS, SERS and OPERS on the following dates:

Tuesdays at 7:00 pm February 22, March 22, 29 and April 5

Wednesdays at 2:30 pm (or after session) March 9, 16, 23, 30, and April 6

Any OEA member who is interested in offering public testimony is encouraged to contact Robert Davis in Governmental Services at 614-227-3069 or davisr@ohea.org for additional information and assistance.

Proposal Calls for Massive Expansion of Vouchers

On Wednesday, February 16, 2011, Representative Matt Huffman (R-Lima) announced plans to introduce legislation that would propose a statewide system of private school vouchers. Under the proposal, there would be no cap on the number of vouchers.

The bill has yet to be introduced, and OEA has not received a copy of the language. However, according to the sponsor, the bill would do the following: create a statewide program with eligibility based on family income; provide vouchers of up to 80% of the amount of state share of education costs; allow unspent voucher proceeds for later use in Educational Savings Accounts; and create a special education voucher program.

OEA strongly opposes private school voucher programs. In a tough economy, facing budget deficits, we need to focus on the essentials. Vouchers drain scarce resources from public schools that serve the majority of Ohio's students and are open to all.