



OEA Legislative Watch

February 28, 2011

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

Take action —
Become an OEA
Member Lobbyist

Questions?

Contact your
Governmental
Services Team

Ron Rapp
Director
rapp@ohea.org

Melissa Clark
Lobbyist
clarkm@ohea.org

Robert Davis
Lobbyist
davisr@ohea.org

Matthew Dotson
Lobbyist
dotsonm@ohea.org

Pete Hackeman
UniServ Political
Advocacy Consultant
hackemanp@ohea.org

Russ Harris
Education Research
Development
Consultant
harrisr@ohea.org

Senate Bill 5 Scheduled for Possible Vote This Week

Senate Bill 5, which drastically curtails collective bargaining rights for public employees, is scheduled for hearings in the Senate Insurance, Commerce & Labor Committee on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of this week. However, the bill could be voted out of committee on any of those days with a subsequent full Senate vote to be scheduled. Senate Republicans have indicated that 50-100 amendments are expected to the bill. The OEA continues to fully oppose Senate Bill 5 and urges you to attend the rally at the Statehouse on Tuesday, March 1 and the Member Lobby Day at OEA Headquarters on Wednesday, March 2.

OEA Offers Testimony on Pension Reform

On Tuesday, February 22, 2011, OEA presented testimony in opposition to portions of House Bill 69. HB 69, sponsored by Representative Lynn Wachtmann (R-Napoleon), addresses pension reform. 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.

Robert Davis from OEA’s Governmental Services Department delivered the testimony. He stated that 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.

As a proposed solution, OEA supports the plan adopted by the STRS Board in October 2010. This plan also had the consensus support of a coalition of employee, employer and retiree groups known as the Healthcare and Pension Advocates for STRS (HPA). The October plan was based on a model of shared responsibility—all those who benefit from the system (employees, employers and retirees) were asked to play a part. In order to improve the long-term funding of STRS, the October plan would reduce liabilities by approximately \$8.5 billion. Additionally, existing liabilities would be paid off more quickly by increased contributions from both employees and employers.

This January, STRS was instructed to make changes to its plan by removing any call for an increase in employer contributions. The result is a plan that abandons the model of shared responsibility and proposes even deeper benefit cuts and higher contributions for active teachers. An additional \$2.4 billion in benefit reductions are shifted towards active teachers. Further, employee contributions are increased even more and phased in at a faster rate. Of particular concern:

- The plan fails to recognize billions of dollars in investment gains this fiscal year resulting in deeper cuts than are needed.
- Changes in retirement eligibility create a “cliff” where most teachers, even those in the latter stages of their careers, would need to work seven or eight years longer than under current law in order to retire with full benefits.
- A five-year deferral of any cost-of-living increase for future retirees could create a rush of retirements.

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

The subcommittee hearing HB 69 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

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.

Legislation Ending Ohio’s Commitment to All-Day Kindergarten Continues to Receive Hearings

House Bill 30 (R-Gardner) and Senate Bill 9 (R-Manning) both propose to eliminate the requirement that Ohio school districts implement all-day Kindergarten programs. House Bill 30 goes farther, also recommending the elimination of other important recent education reforms, including the School Funding Advisory Council, the Closing the Achievement Gap Initiative, and Family and Civic Engagement Teams. Both bills are in the Senate Education Committee. House Bill 30 has passed the Ohio House of Representatives.

Research shows the importance of all-day Kindergarten to improving student achievement, particularly in overcoming adverse effects of poverty, language and cultural differences, and disabilities, on a child’s opportunity to learn.

The OEA believes that Ohio should help school districts fulfill the objective of universal all-day Kindergarten and maintain local flexibility for districts working to address challenges in implementation. In the near term, the OEA recommends allowing waivers for districts working to address capacity challenges and creating a framework that allows school districts to collect reasonable student fees based on family income.

**Senate Bill 86 (D-Sawyer) Would Authorize Charter School Inside Ohio
Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections**

Senate Bill 86 (D-Sawyer) would authorize a charter school inside facilities operated by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC). This legislation was first introduced last General Assembly, where it was opposed by the OEA. The OEA's State Council of Professional Educators (SCOPE) already provide high quality education services in DRC, which would be undermined by an unaccountable drop-out prevention charter school in those facilities. The OEA will continue to oppose this legislation.