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Thank you Chairman Brenner, Ranking Minority Representative Fedor and House Education Committee members.

My name is Gabriella Celeste and I submit this testimony to you today as an interested party in legislative matters concerning school truancy and discipline, specifically House Bill 410. As the Policy Director with the Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University, our Center bridges research with policy, practice and education for the well-being of children and families. It is in this capacity, recognizing the strong link between research and best practice, including the significant economic impacts of disconnected youth, that we support efforts to decriminalize truancy and to promote positive school climate and student success.

Ohio data shows that too many students are removed from schools, and that attendance and school connectedness is crucial for the future success of our young people. Ohio's future economy and prosperity depends on the success of students today. There are examples in Ohio of effective truancy prevention and school-based discipline alternative for students that offer lessons and opportunities for improving outcomes for all of our students.

I. Key facts about truancy and exclusionary discipline in Ohio schools.

FACT: There is no comprehensive truancy data (where truancy data is shown as a measure other than a reason for a disciplinary action) publicly available on the Ohio Department of Education's Ohio School Report Cards, making it very difficult to track uniform statewide truancy data.

FACT: The combined number of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) for truancy and disobedient/disruptive behavior (120,776) is greater than the number of OSS for every other reason combined (57%-62% in 2012-2013 of the total OSS). Disobedient/disruptive behavior is the most common reason cited for the use of OSS in virtually all of Ohio's school district typologies (urban, rural, small town, etc.).¹

FACT: In Ohio, school disciplinary practices resulted in 3,855 expulsions in the 2012-2013 school year; 1,141 of which were for truancy (328) or disobedient/disruptive behavior (813).²

FACT: Students with disabilities and black students are over represented in the use of exclusionary discipline. Among those students with disabilities in Ohio, White students make up 10% of those enrolled but 21% of those receiving OSS for disobedient/disruptive behavior; Black students with disabilities represent 3% of those enrolled and 26% of those receiving OSS for disobedient/disruptive behavior.³ A recent national study highlighted Columbus City Schools as an example of a “hotspot” district, noting that half of all of the Black male secondary students in the district are suspended at least once.⁴

II. High costs, impacts and consequences of disconnected students.

Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youths potentially are headed for delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure. When students are removed from the classroom as a disciplinary measure, whether for truancy or another reason, the odds increase dramatically that they will repeat a grade, drop out, or become involved in the juvenile justice system.⁵ Consider the following negative impacts:

SCHOOL FAILURE: While Ohio’s overall 4-year graduation rates are similar to the national average, Ohio ranks in the bottom 10 states in the country for graduation rates of Black males (53.9%), the group most impacted by harsh disciplinary practices.⁶ According to recent U.S. Department of Education data, only one state (Nevada) has larger racial disparities in graduation rates than Ohio, which has a 29.9 percentage point gap between the Black male graduation rate and White male graduation rate (83.9%).⁷ Weak student engagement, often measured by absenteeism and discipline problems, is also strongly linked with a higher dropout probability.⁸ A Council of State Governments study found students with at least one disciplinary contact were five times more likely to drop out of school compared to those without any disciplinary contact.⁹

INCREASED RISK FOR FUTURE FAILURE & CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT: Roughly 80 percent of Ohio’s adult prisoners are high-school dropouts.¹⁰ School alienation-school bonding is one of the strongest variables in predicting delinquency.¹¹ Research suggests that discipline measures that remove a student from the school setting can isolate students socially, and further impact poorly student well-being. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, it is important to reduce exclusionary disciplinary action for truancy, as it can lead to delinquency, crime, and substance abuse.¹²

LOST ECONOMIC POTENTIAL & COSTS TO TAXPAYERS: Recognizing the link between truancy, school disengagement, dropout and other behavioral risks, the cost of failing to keep youth in school has both immediate and long term fiscal consequences. A 2012 national economic analysis of the impact of “opportunity youth” (neither in school or working) found they impose – on average and compared to other youth – an immediate taxpayer burden of \$13,900 per year and an immediate social burden of \$37,450 per year (2011 dollars). So, for a 16 year old youth no longer in school for example, the study estimates the total taxpayer burden is \$258,240 and the total social burden is \$755,900, for a combined lifetime cost of \$1,014,140 for that youth. See Box 1 below for the costs used to calculate this estimate.¹³ While there is no Ohio specific study of this nature, these national estimates suggest the fiscal implications for Ohio are significant.

Box 1 — The Components of the Economic Burden of Opportunity Youth

Y	Lost earnings	Gross income including fringe benefits (health and pension)
T	Lost tax payments	Includes federal and state income/consumption taxes
C _F	Crime: Public expenditures	Criminal justice system, policing, and corrections expenditures (federal, state, and local)
C _V	Crime: Victim costs	Reduced quality of life, monetary damages, lost earnings
H _F	Health: Public expenditures	Medicaid, Medicare for persons under 65, and other government agency expenditures on health
H _P	Health: Private burdens	Private expenditures on medical treatments (out-of-pocket, private insurance) and private valuations of health
W _S	Welfare: Support programs	Expenditures on social supports (e.g. workforce retraining)
W _F	Welfare: Transfer payments	Amounts paid to individuals who receive government supports
Y _G	Productivity spillovers	General economic gains from a more educated workforce
E _F	Education: Public savings	Lower schooling and college subsidies from government agencies
E _P	Education: Private fee savings	Lower fees and college expenses for families
M	Marginal excess tax burden	Cost of raising taxes to pay for public services
Social Burden = $Y + mC_F + C_V + mH_F + H_P + mW_S + Y_G - mE_F - E_P$		
Fiscal Burden = $T + C_F + H_F + W_S + W_F - E_F$		

III. Ohio-based efforts for reducing truancy and keeping children in schools.

School connectedness matters. When students feel cared for and a part of the school community, they become less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance use, violence, or sexual activity at an early age.¹⁴ Evidence-based and cost effective changes in school disciplinary practices can greatly increase positive school climate, leading to greater academic achievement, school success, effective violence prevention, healthy student development, and teacher retention, as well as diverting struggling students away from the juvenile justice system.

In addition to Ohio’s promotion of **Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**, there are examples of school-based programs aimed at diverting youth from becoming involved in the juvenile justice system.

School-Based Responder Model: Jackson and Summit counties piloted a school-based response diversion models focused on youth with mental health needs. The Summit county model has been successfully expanded from three middle schools to twelve schools and has a training manual to promote replication throughout the state. Jackson county has also expanded its “Teen Talk” responder model to serve all of the county school districts and partnered with a local behavioral health provider to expand its satellite services.¹⁵

Early Warning System: Recognizing that the more students are connected to and engaged in education, the less likely they are to become court involved, the Mahoning County Juvenile Court has partnered with several schools in four school districts to implement an Early Warning System (EWS). The research-based EWS uses existing administrative data on attendance, behavior, and curriculum completion (the ABCs) to identify youth who are at risk for poor outcomes, such as failing grades or dropping out of school, to connect them

with support before they come to the attention of the court. Once youth are identified, each school's team of school employees, court staff, and school resource officers discuss and coordinate services to address individual and family needs. The services may include school-based interventions, referrals to community resources, or gender-specific groups facilitated in the schools by court staff.¹⁶

School-based prevention, early intervention and targeted support efforts offer the most promising and prudent fiscal strategies for keeping students in school, reducing social isolation and increasing the likelihood of student engagement and success. To the extent HB 410 advances these school-based approaches and reduces the opportunity for court intervention by decriminalizing truancy and positively involving parents, this policy will best serve the interests of Ohio's students, their families, our schools and the larger public.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on these important matters. Please contact me at mgc36@case.edu should you have any questions.

Endnotes

¹ Ohio Department of Education. Ohio School Report Cards. 2014. Available at: <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lose D.J. & Martinez D.E., Out of School and Off Track (2013) Available at: http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools/OutOfSchool-OffTrack_UCLA_4-8.pdf

⁵ Rivkin, DH. Truancy Prosecutions of Students and the Right [to] Education. *3 Duke Forum for Law & Social Change*. 2011; 139-161.

⁶ Schott Foundation for Public Education, State Graduation Data (2015) Available at: <http://blackboysreport.org/national-summary/state-graduation-data/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Tyler J.H. and Lofstrom M., Finishing High School: Alternative Pathways and Dropout Recovery, *Child Trends*, Future of Our Children Journal Vol. 19 Number 1 Spring 2009.

⁹ Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, *Breaking Schools Rules*, Council on State Governments Justice Center and Public Policy Research Institute (July 2011). Available at: https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Breaking_Schools_Rules_Report_Final.pdf

¹⁰ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections Available at: <http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/faq.htm>

¹¹ Skiba, R.J. and Rausch, M.K. (2006) Zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In C.M. Everston & C.S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 1063-1089). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Available at: http://www.indiana.edu/~equity/docs/Zero_Tolerance_Effectiveness.pdf

¹² Committee on Student Health, American Academy of Pediatrics. Policy Statement: Organizational Principles to Guide and Define the Child Health Care System and/or Improve the Health of All Children. Out of School Suspension and Expulsion. *American Academy of Pediatrics*. 2003;112(5):1206–1209. Available at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/112/5/1206.full.pdf>

¹³ Belfield C., Levin H., Rosen R. The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth (January, 2012) Available at: http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf

¹⁴ McNeely, C.A., Nonnemaker, J.M., Blum, R.W. Promoting Student Connectedness to School: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." *Journal of School Health*, Vol. 72 (4), 2002.

¹⁵ For more information, see Responder Program Development Manual at: <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Files/Individuals-and-Families/Consumers/Task-Force-on-Criminal-Justice-and-Mental-Illness/Sample-Responder-Manual.aspx>

¹⁶ Frazelle, S. & Nagel, A. A practitioner's guide to implementing early warning systems. *Regional Educational Laboratory at Education Northwest*. January 2015.