

Speaker Cupp, Representatives, thank you for offering me the privilege of speaking in front of you this afternoon. My name is Jamie Zipfel, and I am both a constituent and an educator, so the plans to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act are close to my heart. I'd like to spend the next few minutes in front of you delineating both my experience in Ohio's public schools as well as how the implementation of ESSA, if mismanaged, could harm our kids. For the kids currently in school, there will be no opportunity for a "do-over", no mulligan that can undo what we've lost in terms of growth and opportunity for engagement if we screw this up. So though I'm an unconventional educator and unlikely activist, I stand before you this afternoon to urge your response to ESSA to be measured, steadfast, and well-attuned to the cries of thousands of parents, teachers, and kids impacted by the decisions you will make on this issue. I believe that the Committee's current plan to implement ESSA lacks a connection to existing testimony and a vision for Ohio's schools, as well as thrusts too quickly toward a solution at the expense of our kids.

But before you'll believe me when I tell you those things, it would be helpful for me to explain why this issue moved me to speak in the first place. I am a graduate of Perrysburg High School, just south of Toledo. As the oldest daughter of a single mom, the sacrifices she made for my education are innumerable, but there's one I'd like you to consider. When we moved to Perrysburg in 2001, mom knew that one of the best gifts she could give us was the opportunity that a great education could unlock. For me, that meant music and debate. When I found myself lacking a challenge after my sophomore year, a phenomenal guidance counselor helped me get accepted as a post-secondary student at Bowling Green State University. I started college at 16. When I found myself bereft after not being cast in a school play, a teacher pointed me toward speech and debate. After nominal success in high school, I was recruited to Ohio University's forensics program, then a Top-5 program nationally. In my three years at a public college, I earned 2 Bachelor's degrees, 4 national championships in public speaking, and a full ride to complete my Master's degree. I say this not to toot my own horn, but to demonstrate that all those accolades would have been impossible were it not for the education I'd received at Perrysburg. The education made possible by my mom's hours-long commute each day. Cognizant of the thousands of thankless hours poured into me over the years by teachers and coaches, I now work as a high school speech and debate coach, trying to repay the gifts I've been given. If I could afford to be a public school teacher, I would: but student debt and the lack of income currently make that opportunity out of reach. I know that the goal of ESSA is to ensure that every child has access to what I was given by merit of my mom's ZIP code- I share that goal for my students. The disconnect for me is in the proposed implementation of the plan, which ignores the input of parents and teachers on how

best to achieve equality of opportunity, and constrains this body to a shorter timeline without cause. For those reasons, I urge you Representatives, to at least delay the implementation of Ohio's plan until September 18th.

Initially, the draft plan currently on the table ignores the voices of thousands of Ohioans who have already made clear their desires for Ohio's public schools. Pages 20-22 of the draft state that the ESSA implementation would "Address educators' feedback on opportunities for improvement of Report Card measures"; the Draft Overview section on Report Card Measures states that it would "Improve specific report card measures and components". However, the breakdown of each Report Card Measure does not clarify these components, but promises future clarification at some point. Stakeholders asked that any plan "Place a coherent focus on the needs of students, families and communities by coordinating the need for integrating student supports"; the draft plan promises more "strategies" for administrators, but no concrete funding or guidance on the coordination that should take place. Additionally, the draft plan does not mention poverty, hunger, or homelessness as contributing factors to student success and thereby school quality. Despite stakeholder demand that such factors be considered, the plan does not appear to have meaningfully implemented those requests. The definition of school quality would, if implemented, still fall short of admitting that hunger and instability are the largest barriers to student success. If the Committee had more time, perhaps it could propose changes as a response to the feedback received; as it stands, the draft plan acknowledges stakeholder feedback but does not act upon it. It does not appear to me that the "What we heard" sections of the ESSA draft are accurately reflected in the "Our proposal in response to ESSA" sections.

One of our major goals as a speech team this year was to start a middle-school program. Convinced of the benefits of critical thinking, research analysis, and confident expression, we wanted to start reaching younger students. After a few weeks of practice that had been going well, Madison, one of my most poised and analytical thinkers, was preparing to give a speech on Nigeria's relationship to the larger political community. She's 12, but she never shies away from a challenge. As she walked up to the front of the room to begin, I could see the panic begin to well up on her face. "I can't do this," she said, "I'm going to FAIL." No amount of encouragement, no reminder that she wins by showing up and speaking, no explanation that in speech, it's impossible to fail, would calm her down. The more I reflect on that moment, the more I realize that her world does not have room for incremental success. Standardized testing does not evaluate the degree to which a student tried, or what they learned by getting the answer wrong. My consolations fell flat because for her, there has never been a moment where she was not graded. Madison couldn't envision a world where her success was not measured by

Scantron score. The more I think about the coaching I offered her that day, the more I realize that the ability to envision a solution you cannot see is the cornerstone of our ability to best serve our children. They will grow into a world full of jobs and technologies and problems we cannot yet imagine. The current draft of Ohio's ESSA plan lacks this same vision. There appears to me to be no Polaris, no founding goal that the draft would provide. Like a speech without a thesis, it flounders because there is no ground it sets out to attain. Our children do not need a plan that simply checks all the boxes; I'd argue they've suffered enough of that. Rather, I demand, and our children deserve, a plan that is imaginative enough to envision an education that uses testing strategically--with surgical precision--combined with trust in teachers and interventionists and support and funding that would offer every Madison the space to learn and grow in the way that works best for them.

There is a term we use when coaching debate that has key relevance to today's discussion: that concept is harm. If you and your opponent offer differing plans to solve a problem or uphold a value, it is always important to consider potential negative impacts of your position. Will protecting hate speech harm university students? Will expanding Section 8 harm a community's tax base? My lone debater this year, Carter, could tell you. For every debate topic he's ever seen, there have been harms on both sides. So as I evaluate the draft to implement ESSA, I was surprised to see the harms to heavily weighted in one direction. Representatives, you have an opportunity to delay submission of an implementation plan until September, and I strongly urge that you consider waiting. Waiting until September will require that we maintain the status quo: which is harmful in ways that ESSA attempts to correct. But rushing into passage of this draft too early would harm those same students in the same ways, by leaving current testing burdens in place most especially, but also by ignoring their voices. In almost every section of the draft, your stakeholders have begged you for stability. Rushing a plan in April when you have the option to delay until September--when you have time to reconsider some of the more contentious sections as well as seek out more input from school administrators and local school boards is a rejection of that request for stability. As a constituent, I am not asking that you make a decision quickly; I am asking that you make a decision well. This draft does not represent the best work of this committee; it does not reflect actionable change in response to stakeholder feedback, and it lacks vision for Ohio's schools. Rushing the change will not correct these problems; only mask them. Again, I'd like to thank the Speaker for the floor and the Committee for their time.