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March 23, 2023

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

The Council of the Great City Schools, the coalition of the nation’s largest central city school districts, writes to offer our perspective on H.R. 5, the Parents Bill of Rights Act pending before the Committee. Urban schools have long supported and encouraged family involvement in our students’ education and view parental engagement as an invaluable tool to further school improvement. Yet H.R. 5 includes excessive and redundant federal requirements that are costly, time-consuming, and unnecessary to improve student performance. The bill also contains problematic requirements, such as provisions that impede school districts’ ability to operate effective instructional programs and ones that may deter the identification of students that need mental health support. The Council does not support H.R. 5 and urges House leaders to develop legislation that focuses on the instructional improvements and supports that provide our students with the best opportunity for success in school and life.

Urban school districts provide an endless number of engagement opportunities and have longstanding local policies and state laws to foster this connection. Parental involvement on school-based committees is routine in urban schools, with positions designated specifically for parents and family members to review library materials and textbooks, budget expenditures, school safety procedures, and school improvement plans to increase student learning. The inclusion of federal requirements in H.R. 5 that, for example, mandate a specific number of in-person teacher meetings per year, the annual disclosure of library and reading materials at each school, and detailed budget publications needlessly duplicate commonplace practices in districts that customarily have multiple parent-teacher meetings, online card catalogs, and regular public meetings for developing annual district-level and school-level budgets that are posted on the districts’ websites.

We also do not support provisions that hinder districts’ ability to provide the instruction and support that our students need to succeed. Urban school districts have worked hard to ensure that the benefits of content-rich resources are available to our children and have invested in online tools to promote an “anywhere/anytime” approach to learning. Encouraging parental objections to the use of such technology will likely prove extremely disruptive for all students and creates avoidable strictures for school and district staff. Similarly, any restrictions on access to school psychologists and counselors to support mental health will unsettle school districts that are prioritizing the well-being of those students that need it most.

Urban school districts are committed to their students, parents, and families and have long worked to keep them informed, inspired, and ready to partner with their local schools. Authentic parent engagement is essential to increasing student achievement and readiness for college, career, and life. The Council urges a NO vote on H.R. 5 and encourages Congress to develop legislation that will help our districts and school communities reach these goals.

Sincerely,

Raymond Hart  
Executive Director