



South-Western City Schools

District Service Center

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May 21, 2019

The Honorable Scott Oelslager, Chair
House Finance Committee
Riffe Center – 13th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Representative Oelslager:

Attached you will please find a copy of my testimony delivered on April 30, 2019 to the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee in support of Senate Bill 4. I would encourage a favorable report of this legislation to the House Rules and Reference Committee, and I would like to express my appreciation for the support of the Finance Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Bill Wise'.

Bill Wise, Ph.D.
Superintendent



South-Western City School District

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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April, 2019

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ADDRESSING SB 4

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chairman Jones, and Ranking Member Robinson, my name is Bill Wise, and I am Superintendent of the South-Western City School District in Franklin County. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 4, which would appropriate an additional \$100 million for the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission to continue its important work.

In order to provide context, I would like to share a little about the district and our construction efforts as we attempt to meet the ever growing needs of our students and community. The South-Western City School District is the fifth largest district in the state of Ohio. We encompass 119-square-miles and serve approximately 22,000 students and their families in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Our diverse student population continues to grow in the number of students that speak a primary language other than English (27%), the number of students that have a documented learning disability (16%), and the number of students living in economically challenged homes (57.25%). When looking for other districts similar to South-Western City Schools there really are none. With that said, we may resemble the entire state better than any other single district in Ohio

We have completed several construction projects over the past quarter century. We conducted two significant projects by ourselves and one in partnership with the OFCC. These projects were driven by a combination of needs - space for our growing population and replacement of buildings that have reached their end of useful life. Our most recent project began its planning in 2006, passed our local match in 2012, and completed construction in 2019. This project allows us to serve approximately 10,000 students in new or like new facilities that are equipped to meet the needs of today's students and teachers. Through community engagement, careful planning, and our partnership with the OFCC, we were able to deliver 15 elementary schools and a high school for our students. This partnership with the State not only provided financial resources, it provided additional expertise and experience allowing us to ultimately deliver these facilities on time and under budget. We were also able to add 450 additional seats for students than originally planned to meet the future needs of our growing population.

Even before the first phase of segment one was completed, we entered into conversations with the commission to plan for the second segment of our master plan. The second segment of our construction project, once again focuses on space and replacing buildings that are reaching the end of useful life. The buildings in the greatest need are our middle school buildings. We contemplated including two of our oldest high schools into the second segment of our construction project. Based on advice from the OFCC, we decided not to include those facilities in this segment because the financial burden for the Commission would significantly delay our ability to begin the project in a timely manner. By late 2015, we had a plan outlining the general scope, timeline, and financing for our project.

We followed that plan and in the fall of 2018 secured our local share for segment two. We are ready and eager to partner with the State of Ohio and the OFCC to deliver another project on time and under budget that will serve tens of thousands of students over the next several decades.

The ability to move forward with this project as soon as possible allows us to capture interest rates that are still at historically low levels, avoid unnecessary inflationary costs, avoid the cost of temporary classrooms, and eliminate expenses which can no longer be recaptured in aging facilities that have reached the end of useful life. Other districts active in the planning process can also be served more quickly to capitalize on the same benefits and compound the savings for the residents of Ohio.

Providing facilities that support the academic programming needed to educate our students in a safe, cost-effective, and efficient manner is an extraordinary opportunity. Our experience with previous construction projects clearly demonstrates the difference a new building can make on the education of students and pride in the community. From pick-up to drop-off the very essence of how a school building functions can be altered by having a facility capable of supporting the ideals outlined in the OFCC Program of Requirements.

Chairman Blessing, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to share our experiences with you and offer this proponent testimony on Senate Bill 4.