

**COUNCILMEMBER ERIC HARMON
CITY OF UHRICHSVILLE**

**INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY BEFORE THE OHIO SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
HOUSE BILL 166 - OPERATING BUDGET
FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021
MAY 23, 2019**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify as an interested party in front of the committee in regards to House Bill 166. I'm Eric Harmon, a Councilmember from the city of Uhrichsville, located in Tuscarawas County - one of Ohio's thirty two rural Appalachian counties.

To give you some brief and basic background information about Uhrichsville, I would like you to know that according to the 2010 census, Uhrichsville had a population of approximately 5,413 residents. Uhrichsville also operates on a 3.2 million dollar budget while maintaining a police, fire, and service department. Furthermore, I am here today to discuss the importance of the local government fund. However, I am not here today to cast blame, engage in political pestering, or cast aspersions against any member who may disagree with me. The residents I represent back home in Uhrichsville don't really care how we got here. They don't care who is to blame. They also do not care who comes up with the solutions. However, they deserve and need resolutions to the funding issues that we are facing right now.

Please allow me to take you back to 2005 before the recession hit Ohio. The City of Uhrichsville was once receiving 350,000 dollars from the State of Ohio through the local government fund. Although that may not sound like a lot of money to larger cities or other urban areas, 350,000 dollars can go a long way for small towns like Uhrichsville. Since fiscal year 2011, Uhrichsville has seen a continued loss of revenue through the decline of local government funding, which has since caused a strain on the Uhrichsville budget. Uhrichsville now receives approximately 90,000 dollars from the State of Ohio through the local government fund. With losses of revenue, the City of Uhrichsville has had to shrink and minimize vital services that residents rely on.

To give you some perspective of how important the local government fund is to small rural towns like Uhrichsville, I would like to point out to you some of the challenges that the City of Uhrichsville has faced over the past couple of years.

As a council member, I am constantly reminded of just how important infrastructure is by the number of phone calls I receive from constituents expressing their legitimate concerns over potholes and street maintenance issues. Before the summer of 2018, the last road that was fully paved within the City of Uhrichsville took place during the summer of 2007. That was the same year that Uhrichsville leaders had to discontinue their paving program. That means that Uhrichsville residents endured eleven years of no road paving.

I would also like to point out that in the year 2012, Uhrichsville leaders faced a 200,000 dollar shortfall in their budget. Due to this shortfall, Uhrichsville leaders were forced to reduce vital services that Uhrichsville residents rely on. During the budget process that year, members of the Uhrichsville City Council Finance Committee even considered abolishing the Police Department. To avoid such a catastrophe, members of the Fraternal Order of Police Union pleaded with members of Uhrichsville Council by offering salary reductions, decreases in workweek and vacation days per week in a desperate attempt to save their jobs. Cuts to the local government fund have also made it harder for the Uhrichsville Police Department to adequately fight the ongoing opioid crisis. It goes without saying that the opioid crisis has affected each and every single one of our communities. In 2017, 25% of the opioid related overdoses in Tuscarawas County took place in Uhrichsville alone.

Residents I serve wonder why there are so many communities having to enact more levies, bond issues, and other ballot measures these days. The answer is that cuts to the local government fund have resulted in less police officers, less firefighters, and crumbling infrastructure. Funding cuts have created significant financial shortages at the local level, forcing Uhrichsville and many Eastern Ohio communities alike to tighten their budgets to the point where it's extremely difficult to adequately fund essential services that residents we represent rely on.

With that being said, I am encouraged by Governor Dewine's proposed 9.1% increase to the local government fund in the proposed operating budget for the fiscal year 2020 and the 1.8% increase in fiscal year 2021. I am appreciative to members of the Ohio House of Representatives as well for recognizing the importance of the local government fund and retaining the proposed increase in the substitute bill. Although I believe that an even greater investment is needed and warranted for Ohio's municipalities, I am thankful that we are not seeing further cuts. It goes without saying that the relationship between local government and the legislature is in need of repair and I believe that this is a good first step in the right direction. At a time of dire need for rural communities, the proposed increase of revenue, if approved would be put to good use by Uhrichsville leaders in funding need based services such as first responder operations and infrastructure.

Uhrichsville City Council

305 E. Second St. Uhrichsville, OH 44683

330-556-1368 - eharmon@cityofuhrichsville.org

Committee on Economic Development | Committee on Parks & Recreation | Committee on Ambulance Services

The topic of local government funding is critically important to the City of Uhrichsville for financial, economic, and public safety reasons. Thank you for the time you have spent gathering information and listening to constituents, experts and your partners in local government. Now is the time to identify and enact an increased yet fair and modest local government fund that does not place a heavy tax burden on working families and small towns like Uhrichsville. Thank you again for your time. I will try my best to answer any questions that you might have.

Uhrichsville City Council

305 E. Second St. Uhrichsville, OH 44683

330-556-1368 - eharmon@cityofuhrichsville.org

Committee on Economic Development | Committee on Parks & Recreation | Committee on Ambulance Services