

Testimony of the Juvenile Justice Coalition
Senate Finance Committee
Sub. HB 166: FY20-21 Operating Budget
May 2019

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on Sub. HB 166, Ohio's operating budget for the FY 20-21 biennium. My name is Cayla Burton and I am the Policy Director of the Juvenile Justice Coalition (JJC).

JJC is a state-wide advocacy organization that focuses on youth in Ohio's juvenile courts and works to align current practice with research-based, best practices that improve outcomes for youth involved or at-risk of involvement in the juvenile court system, their families, their communities, and all Ohioans. Below you will find testimony on the Student Wellness and Success Fund under HB 166, as well as attachments from the ACLU of Ohio Youth Ambassador Program on Ohio's Fair School Funding Plan.

Funding for Student Wellness & Safety

Effective investments in school safety should focus on improving school climates and increasing access to trauma-informed social emotional supports, including school-based addiction and mental health services and licensed prevention and treatment professionals, such as counselors, social workers, and nurses.

HB 166 prioritizes investments into evidence-based and effective approaches to school safety that improve not only safety outcomes, but also improve overall school functioning. Within the ODE appropriations, HB 166 creates the Student Wellness and Success Fund (SWSF) initiative, which specifically targets the non-academic barriers to student success and addresses the needs of the whole child. The bill invests \$275 million in FY20, and \$400 million in FY21 to provide a total of \$675 million over the biennium for this work. With this additional funding, schools will be able to provide youth with mental health counseling, wraparound supports, mentoring and after-school programs by partnering with community organizations that focus on alcohol, drug and mental health treatment, developmental disabilities, social services, and nonprofits with experience serving children.

In talking with youth leaders on student wellness and success, youth in the group made the following recommendations on how the funds can be best used:

- Focusing on improving student wellbeing by offering students specialized in-school counseling and support, including grief, trauma-informed, and culturally competent counselors, as well as counselors who are able to respond to traumatic events that may occur within the community.
- Creating a self-care room that students can access during their school schedule, in place of courses like study hall.
- Counselors should reflect the race and ethnicity of the students they serve.
- Wraparound services should include intentional support for both youth and parents, with periodic check-ins on a student's family well-being.
- Having more mentors that are easily accessible and creating a peer-to-peer mentorship program, providing youth with the opportunity for paid leadership experience.
- Implementing a community food-pantry for families to access, especially if the school is located in a food desert where families and students don't have access to healthy food options.
- Developing college tours with youth and student input to increase student exposure to different colleges and programs and help to prepare them for post-secondary education and success.

Fair School Funding Plan

Finally, I would like to briefly mention Representatives Cupp's and Patterson's Fair School Funding Plan, which proposes changes to the state's school funding formula. Although the plan is not currently being considered within HB 166, our organization supports the direction and intention of the proposed funding formula but have suggestions on how to improve the school safety provisions of the plan. As discussion around the plan continue, I urge members to consider the following recommendations and rationale to approach school safety from a trauma-informed and positive, evidenced-based social emotional approach to student wellness and safety under the plan:

Recommendation 1: In the base cost formula, combine the non-personnel and personnel safety and security line items and set a maximum per student amount that can be used for non-personnel hardware. Funding non-personnel security hardware on an ongoing basis may force school districts to over-invest unnecessarily in physical security measures that further harden and militarize schools. School districts should have the flexibility to make decisions about how to best invest in safety measures to meet the needs of their students, particularly if physical security thresholds have been reached.

Recommendation 2: In the base cost formula, remove the maximum personnel limitations. These limitations could restrict schools that wish to use this funding to hire additional or part-time personnel. For example, schools may find that they can work with community partners to combine funding and share an employee that works both in the community and in the school.

Recommendation 3: In the base cost formula, require that any qualified crisis intervention and threat assessment personnel receive specific, school-based threat assessment training within the "Social/Emotional/Security/Life Support" personnel line item. Many law enforcement officials and security personnel are not trained in threat assessment to evaluate threats based on the specific circumstances, including the nature of the threat, the student's personality, and the family, school, and social dynamics.

Recommendation 4: Add the language of the poverty add-on to the "Structural and Student Supports" section of the base cost formula. Although more resources should be directed specifically to economically-disadvantaged youth for trauma-informed social, mental health, and emotional supports, research shows that these are the exact supports that help keep all students safe. Including this language in the base cost formula will ensure that every child gets the support that they need to be engaged and successful students, while keeping schools safe.

In closing, I encourage members of this committee to maintain, if not expand, funding appropriations the Student Wellness and Success Fund, as this funding is critically important to ensuring the wellbeing and success of Ohio's young people. Research clearly shows that creating a supportive school environment that provides students with additional mental health and social-emotional supports not only improves school safety, but also improves academic outcomes for all students and long-term student success.

Attachments

TO: Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Jalice Estrict- ACLU of Ohio Youth Ambassador, David Simpkins- ACLU of Ohio Youth Ambassador

RE: Ohio Fair Funding Plan, ACLU Youth Ambassador Testimony

Jalice Estrict, age 19

E-mail: jestRICT26@gmail.com

My name is Jalice Estrict, I am a senior at Mc2 Stem High School in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. I am an ACLU Youth Ambassador and very interested in politics and civic engagement. I wanted to thank lawmakers for focusing on the youth. The Ohio Fair Funding Plan is an important first step towards investing in the kids who will be the future one day. I am also glad to see a funding formula that accounts for the mental health resources for districts with greater needs due to poverty. There needs to be more attention to youth who are suffering while they are young.

I have grown up with police and metal detectors in my school my whole life. I have not felt any safer. A lot of my classmates have been traumatized by seeing friends and family die in our neighborhoods. When I know my friends are able to receive the help they need, or go to a nurse when they are sick or depressed, that is when I'll consider a school a safe place for everyone. Counselors, not cuffs or cameras in every corner of the hallway, make schools a place to learn and thrive.

Thank you for your time. I hope you continue making decisions that support kids in Ohio.

David Simpkins, age 17

E-mail: d.simpkins@gmail.com

My name is David Simpkins. I am a 17 year old junior at John Adams High School in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. I am an ACLU of Ohio Youth Ambassador. I have been interested in the Ohio School Funding Plan and House Bill 2018 because I believe we must invest in the future of Ohio's kids. I believe investing in the mental health of our youth is the most important investment we could ever make. I want to thank the members of this committee for devoting the funds to do this.

Schools are dangerous when they don't support youth. I have been to schools that only has a nurse one day a week, no therapist, and no school psychologist. Schools are unsafe when kids feel alone and isolated. Schools are dangerous when we don't feel supported by the adults in the building. I have watched kids try to commit suicide because they couldn't get the help they needed when they needed it. Police and metal detectors make me feel like a criminal. They don't make me feel trusted or even part of the school community. It hurts me to feel that way. We need more trauma informed care and more people trained to work with kids who live in poverty or don't have parents. I hope the next generation of Ohio students have more options than some of my classmates. Thank your time. I hope you consider my testimony in the decision to move forward with the Ohio School Funding Plan.