

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

PLEASE COMPLETE THE WITNESS INFORMATION FORM BEFORE TESTIFYING

DATE: MARCH 18, 2015

NAME: AMY L. DELUCA

ORGANIZATION: SHEFFIELD-SHEFFIELD LAKE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
(IF APPLICABLE)

POSITION/TITLE: SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

ADDRESS: 1824 HARRIS ROAD

CITY: SHEFFIELD VILLAGE STATE: OHIO ZIP: 44054

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ARE YOU REPRESENTING: YOURSELF _____ ORGANIZATION X

DO YOU WISH TO TESTIFY ON

LEGISLATION (BILL NUMBER): H.B. 64

SPECIFIC ISSUE: STATE BUDGET

SUBJECT MATTER: SCHOOL FUNDING PROPOSAL

DO YOU FAVOR _____ OR OPPOSE X THE ENACTMENT OF LEGISLATION REGARDING THIS ISSUE?

PLEASE GIVE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE GROUNDS ON WHICH YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE SUCH ENACTMENT:

I oppose the enactment of H.B. 64 in its current form due to the impact the proposed education funding formula has on my district and those similarly situated to it.

WILL YOU HAVE A WRITTEN STATEMENT, VISUAL AIDS, OR OTHER MATERIAL TO DISTRIBUTE?

YES X No _____

(IF YES, PLEASE PROVIDE COPIES TO THE CHAIRMAN OR SECRETARY)

HOW MUCH TIME WILL YOUR TESTIMONY REQUIRE? 5 MINUTES

**House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee
H.B. 64 Testimony**

**Amy L. DeLuca, Esq.
Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District Board of Education Member**

March 18, 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

Chairman Cupp, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify here this afternoon. My name is Amy DeLuca and I am a member of the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District Board of Education and a parent of two boys in 2nd and 4th grades. While I am currently a practicing lawyer, I have a strong background in education, having taught in both public and private schools and having parents who retired after working for many years as a teacher and a custodian. On a personal note, I am thrilled to be able to testify in front of Representative Cupp. I was in the inaugural class of the Ohio State Bar Association Leadership Academy in 2010 and had the pleasure of meeting then Justice Cupp and hearing him speak on the duties and obligations of lawyers to take on leadership roles. I am here today to do just that.

In the twenty-one (21) months I have served on the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake School Board, I have had to make some very difficult decisions. Our district serves approximately 1,850 students and operates with an annual budget of approximately \$19,000,000.00. We have not passed any new operating levies in 10 years. We have reduced costs by close to \$700,000.00 in recent years due to attrition and other cost saving measures. Unfortunately, when we reviewed our 5 year forecast, without additional operating funds, these savings are not enough. So, as the current funding formula wants us to do, we turned to our local residents for approval of a levy.

In November 2014 we attempted to pass a 9.5 mill operating levy that would have taken us through FY 2017. That levy failed miserably. In order to reduce the mills we were seeking, the district made reductions, including eliminating approximately 20 teaching positions, all freshman sports, our drama program, and our elementary gifted program. The cuts, which will be effective next school year, total a savings of \$1,735,521.90. With these cuts, we were able to reduce the mills we are seeking to 6.5 mill levy to get us through FY 2017, but at what cost to the students and this does not solve the long-term funding issues. If our levy does not pass in May, our district will further reduce staff, eliminate all sports, band, choir, and virtually all extra-curricular clubs. We will have no additional funds for advanced classes and our class sizes will increase even more. The impact these losses will have on our students will be devastating. The school funding proposal contained in H.B. 64 only adds salt to this wound, with our calculations showing an additional \$441,000.00 in reductions if this current version of H.B. 64 is enacted. Appearing on paper to have the ability to fund locally does not mean that is a real and consistent option or possibility in reality. The present situation in the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District proves this.

II. SCHOOL FUNDING PROPOSAL

While I appreciate that H.B. 64 may represent an effort to attempt to right the ship of school funding in the State of Ohio, these efforts fall short. Allow me to provide you with some information regarding the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District to support my position.

- The Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District is made up of two separate communities: Sheffield Village with a population of a little under 4,000 and Sheffield Lake with a population of around 10,000. The Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District serves around 1,850 students. Approximately 80% of the students in the district come from Sheffield Lake while approximately 20% come from Sheffield Village. Based on the census data, county information and other information I reviewed, there is about a \$100,000.00 difference between the median home value in Sheffield Lake and the median home value in Sheffield Village, with home values in Sheffield Village, being higher. The gap would undoubtedly be even larger if the outlier lake front homes in Sheffield Lake were eliminated from the equation.
- In terms of Capacity Measure, Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District is in the 5th Quintile, ranking 491 out of 610 school districts. This means, under the current funding proposal, Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District is considered to be in the top quintile of districts in the state in terms of local capacity to fund its schools. Keep that in mind and recall my earlier point that no new operating funds have been passed by voters in the district in 10 years.
- Of the approximately 1,850 students in our district, 47% (or 870, nearly half) qualify for free or reduced lunch. While I recognize that some of these students may be from the same household, if these households don't have enough money to buy lunch for their children, what logic is employed to suggest they would have additional household income to pay additional taxes to support an operating levy for the school district.
- There are 4,768 households between the two municipalities making up our district. Approximately 25% of the school age children in Sheffield Village attend private school. I can personally stand in my driveway in my subdivision in Sheffield Village and see 6 houses where children living there were sent to private school since we moved into our home in 2003. This does not include the four families of neighbors who have moved to other local communities, sighting the lack of support for the schools as at least part of the reason for their moves. When these folks sending their children to private schools are already absorbing the cost of tuition into their household budgets, there is little room or appetite for shelling out additional funds to support schools their children are not even attending. Yes, we have talked to these folks about property values and the link between strong schools and strong communities, but the fact of the matter is when a quarter of your population is spending money on school tuition elsewhere, sometimes supporting the local public school takes a lower priority.
- While I am not an accountant, it appears the present funding formula does not properly and/or completely take into account the current local tax rates already being paid by property owners of the school district. In Sheffield Lake for example (the municipality where most of our students live and where most of our district's population resides), 14% of the population is below the poverty level. The median household income is

approximately \$47,000.00. Property owners in Sheffield Lake pay \$18.61 in municipal taxes (solely those taxes to support the operation of the City of Sheffield Lake) per every \$1,000.00 of assessed taxable value. This is the highest municipal property tax in Lorain County, yet Sheffield Lake is by far not the most wealthy municipality in Lorain County.

The proposed funding system is simply fundamentally flawed. It appears to attempt to operate in a vacuum. When reading the Primary and Secondary Education FY2016-17 Ohio School Foundation Funding Formula Simulation Fact Sheet prepared by the Office of Budget and Management, I was pleased to see it included some recognition that a district's individual circumstances can always impact its funding ability, yet I have not yet seen anything that gives me any solace these individual circumstances will be addressed in a fair and equitable manner. Furthermore, when I saw this same summary from the Office of Budget and Management referring to "Ohio's student centered funding formula," I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Simply taking into account a district's average daily membership does not make a formula "student centered." To be centered around something means to be primarily concerned with it. If our system of school funding was truly a "student centered" system, it would not only take into account the raw numbers, but look at the reality of each particular district, what each district is able to offer and what each district is lacking. Until we find a way to fund schools so that students in the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District can have the same opportunities as students in any other district in the State of Ohio, the funding formula is not "student centered."

III. CONCLUSION

Chairman Cupp and members of the subcommittee, I will not insult you by suggesting that I have the solution for this school funding dilemma, but I will ask that in reviewing H.B. 64 and considering possible revisions that you try to find a better way to take into account the tax burdens already facing property owners in our district and most importantly, that you think about the students of Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District and consider what this funding proposal will do to them. Only then should you be comfortable referring to the state school funding formula as "student centered."

Thank you for your time and this opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.