

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

PLEASE COMPLETE THE WITNESS INFORMATION FORM BEFORE TESTIFYING

DATE: March 18, 2015

NAME: Valerie Rion

ORGANIZATION: Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City Schools  
(IF APPLICABLE)

POSITION/TITLE: Teacher

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ARE YOU REPRESENTING: YOURSELF \_\_\_\_\_ ORGANIZATION X

DO YOU WISH TO TESTIFY ON

LEGISLATION (BILL NUMBER): HB 64

SPECIFIC ISSUE: Budget

SUBJECT MATTER: Education-School funding

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 budget proposal due to potential cuts to our school district.

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

My name is Valerie Rion and I am a teacher in the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City School District. I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to speak here today. As I think about being here in a place where people work to make decisions that affect the lives of so many each day, it is humbling to be a part of such a great country that allows an average citizen such as myself the freedom to address those that govern over us. But I stand here in front of you as just one voice of many, and I know that what I have to say goes far beyond my own needs and addresses a problem that is affecting a large portion of our state today. It is for that reason that I ask that for your attention now.

I am here today to address concerns over House Bill 64, which I understand includes a formula that determines the amount of state funding each school district will either gain or lose over the next two years. I am deeply concerned about the possible effects of this budget proposal on my community, my school district, and my students. We simply cannot afford to lose any more than we already have in recent years. So I am here today as a teacher, a community member, and a parent requesting that you do not allow this bill to pass as it is currently written, and that you consider how reducing the current inadequate funds even more will essentially destroy the future of two Northeast Ohio communities.

It is no secret that the way we fund our schools in Ohio has been a point of controversy for decades now. The system of relying on voters to say yes to new tax levies every few years has created quite a gap between districts in terms of resources and opportunities. For some districts it seems that the money is always there. The voters are always willing to say yes to more in order to further the opportunities of their children. But in other districts, those where citizens struggle financially, levy passage is harder to accomplish. In those districts the teachers and students get by with considerably less resources than the other more affluent areas. Should the opportunities a student has depend on how much money local residents can afford? Can we say with a clear conscience that a child that lives in a community with ample money is worth more than one whose community has been hit hard by unemployment and poverty? Of course we can't say that one child is worth more than another, and essentially that's not what is in question here today. The bottom line is that as districts we accept the system and we somehow live within it. But that acceptance comes with the knowledge that the state will be providing its share of funds - a per pupil stipend - and then each district has to hope that they can make up for any deficiency with tax-payer approved dollars. The more recent problem, though, is that districts are now having to contend with a steady decline in the amount of money the state is providing in their share of the system. Over the last four years, funding for public education has been cut drastically, and House Bill 64 will once again reduce the amount of money that many districts such as Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City Schools will receive. We simply cannot afford to lose anymore funding, and quite frankly, our students deserve more than what this bill is saying they are worth.

I'm here today along with a school board member and three amazing students because as it stands, our district is set to lose even more than we already have recently. Just this November we saw a proposed levy fail. This failure led to an overwhelming amount of cuts

that the district was forced to make. These cuts included staff members as well as programs that we may never get back. I went to school one day and saw 1/3 of my coworkers lose their jobs for next year. I cannot express in words the feeling of loss that was in the building that day. And not just on the part of those whose jobs were cut. It hit everyone - teachers, administrators, and most importantly, students. I teach high school, so these are young adults and they understand what something this big means. Now, we are all faced with the task of passing a levy in May. If this one fails, our students and community will lose all of their music, sports, and extra-curricular programs. We are working so hard to help the community see how necessary the passage of this levy is to our district's future. I have never been more proud to be a teacher than the last few months - watching these kids step up and work hard to come up with ways to help the community see what we already know, and that's the simple fact that our children are worth the cost of financial sacrifice.

That brings me back to the current proposed bill. After all of the cuts that have been made in our district, we are hopeful for a May passage to at least keep us from losing even more. But now we have another issue. With this new budget, our district stands to lose over \$400,000 more next year alone. There is just not much left for a district our size with our demographics to cut. What is the message that is being sent to our students and students just like ours all over the state? That somehow if they don't happen to live in a district that benefits from the proposed formula that they are worth less? That their futures don't matter as much as others who live in other areas? As a parent I strive to never do or say anything that would make my children even question my commitment to their success or well being. Shouldn't the state do the same? It seems that if there is one group of people that we should look out for, it would be the group of people who will be leading us in the years to come. When students hear things like "state budget cuts to education," they are smart enough to make connections to how their education and their futures rank in the priorities of those who govern. If we want to have children who are going to grow up to care enough to change the world for the better, we have to let them know that we believe they can. We let them know this by making their education a financial priority.

I am here representing one school district in the state. On paper our district is a set of numbers that allows a group of people to determine how much each student is worth. And I understand that it is someone's job to make that determination. But I guess my hope is that whoever is making that decision realizes that education is about more than numbers. On paper, our district appears to be better off than it is. We have lake-front property that inflates what our property values appear to be. In reality, though, most of our residents are struggling financially and cannot afford continued tax increases. We don't have a lot of business in our communities, which I understand is a part of the discussion as well. And again, I understand the philosophy behind rewarding communities that are generating tax dollars. However, by essentially punishing the districts that are already struggling with a poor economy, we are continuing a cycle of disparity. In reality, those communities that are struggling are the ones that need the most financial assistance. Maybe it is time that we look elsewhere for places to cut funds. Perhaps the state should reconsider how much money is being given to fund

charter schools that are perpetually failing. These schools are established as private entities, so shouldn't their funding be private as well?

As a teacher I love knowing that I have the opportunity each day to make a positive difference in the lives of my students. I think that as members of this committee, you too have that opportunity. Conversely, I am positively impacted on a daily basis by these students. They inspire me. The fact that we had high school juniors and seniors who volunteered to come here and speak is something that should inspire us all. In that same way, I hope that you will be open to the testimonies that you are hearing and allow people, not politics, to inspire you to make a difference as well. By reconsidering the proposed funding formula and deciding to not take money away from already struggling districts, so many students will be impacted positively. I understand that there are complexities that make all funding issues difficult ones. My hope is that something that was said here today will remind you that education is supposed to be about doing what is best for the students and their development, not just about the bottom line. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.