



## River View Local School District

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*"Building Educational Excellence for Tomorrow. . .Today"*

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Good morning Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee of the House Finance and Appropriations Committee.

My name is Dalton Summers, and I am the Superintendent of the River View Local School District located in Coshocton County. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 64, the biennial budget for Ohio.

The River View Local School District is currently the 8<sup>th</sup> largest geographical school district in our state, covering 376 square miles. Our current enrollment is 2127 pre K – 12. There are no major towns or cities within our district, and the average median income is around \$30,000.

Despite rural challenges, we have been consistently rated as a high achieving district. Our graduation rate has averaged 94% over the last ten years. We offer the opportunity to earn 33 college credits within our high school. We continue to take advantage of all opportunities made available to our students, such as being a recipient of one of the state's Straight A grants. We are a district which has proven to be able to adapt, overcome, and succeed while learning how to do more with less.

While there are many components in the proposed budget bill that lend to another potential \$750,000 loss in our state revenue over the next two years, I am here today to speak specifically to the challenge of cost and funding for school transportation in rural, Appalachia Ohio. I am here to ask you to consider fully funding a formula, outside of the existing funding formula, so it is not subject to the guarantee or the cap. I am also asking you to consider reinstating a bus purchasing program to assist districts, such as River View, where the continual need to replace buses carries such a large cost.

Let me begin by saying that we are grateful that the administration has attempted to create language to further assist in transportation costs; however, I fear that any adjustments made inside the current funding formula and subject to the guarantee or cap will not have a positive effect on many districts, like ours, where it is most needed.

River View currently spends 1.6 million dollars annually for transportation costs. This is \$400,000 more than the current funding provides. Due to the 376 square miles of rural roads and low density population, we spend approximately \$1,200 per student out of our current educational budget. We believe strongly that every child, whether 1 mile away or as is in our case, 20 to 30 miles away from the school, is entitled to and deserves an education. A fully funded method placed outside of the existing state formula would assist us in providing resources we need. It would reduce the amount of funds currently being drawn away from educational needs. We are asking that this separate funding plan consider those districts, like River View, who have taken every measure to achieve maximum efficiency through methods such as double routing, enabling us to run the 8<sup>th</sup> largest geographical transportation operation with just 23 buses and full-time drivers. We need to be adequately funded based on the job being done and the students being transported rather than other factors outside of the district's control.

This funding would be based on understood, transparent, and available data that would encourage good local policy, and be fully funded and allowed to work, not subject to caps and guarantees.

Finally, we are asking that a component be included in this formula to assist in the purchase of buses for those who need them most. In order for a district, like River View, to continue to be as efficient as we are, we have to replace our fleet on a regular basis. Many of our buses travel double the state average miles per year. Our roads are primarily secondary and gravel back roads which increase wear and tear on our fleet. We are forced to pay more than normal to maintain and purchase buses based on the nature of our roads and mileage. A continuous bus replacement program is a necessity at River View, and the cost of each bus suitable for our vast rural routes is exceeding \$85,000 per unit. We are continually drawing money away from revenue intended for classroom instruction and student education.

In conclusion, the River View Local School District has always and will always continue to attempt to work with whatever resources we have to provide the quality education our students deserve. Because of our high miles and very low population density, we are being challenged to continue to pull the increasingly limited funds available for the educational process away from the classroom to apply them to transport our students to our front door. Recent transportation formulas inside the state formula have been limited by caps and or guarantees. This has restricted the ability for any transportation formula to work for districts like mine, which need it the most. Our efforts to maximize our efficiencies and make sure that all of our students are safely transported to schools are not enough by themselves to keep from drawing more money away from what is needed to give our girls and boys a proper 21<sup>st</sup> century education. We desperately need your consideration, support, and efforts in this most important issue.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 64, and I stand ready to address questions from the committee at the pleasure of the Chair.

Thank You,

Dalton Summers  
Superintendent, RVLSD