

Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee of the Ohio House Finance and Appropriations Committee, my name is Robert Mehno, and I am Superintendent of the Leetonia Exempted Village School District located in Columbiana County. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on House Bill 64, the biennial budget bill for Ohio.

The Leetonia Exempted Village School District encompasses 22 square miles and includes Leetonia Village, Washingtonville Village and Salem Township. The median income is \$29,196. The Leetonia School District has 714 students and a K-12 Campus that was completed in 2002. Forty – eight percent of our students are on free or reduced lunch. Leetonia is classified on the district analysis summary as being in Quintile 1: Rural, high student poverty and small student population.

The budget, as it is now proposed, will have a tremendous impact on the Leetonia Exempted Village School District. The budget proposal reduces the state aid to Leetonia Schools by \$68,000 a year for each of the next two years. Even with a projected 4% increase in property values, which would raise \$11,500, the loss to the district would be \$56,500. The proposed reduction of \$68,000 is equivalent to a reduction of two mills from a district that has made tremendous sacrifices to live within its means after several levy failures.

The Leetonia staff and community pulled together to be efficient and effective with limited funds after the levy failures. The FTE for the district has been reduced 32% from the first year the levy was attempted until today. The staff did not receive a pay increase for seven years, administrators took pay cuts, positions were realigned to reduce personnel and several programs were discontinued. However, our students continued to flourish academically. The Leetonia School District has finished in the top 100 school districts according to the state of Ohio's Value Added Indicator for three consecutive years. Furthermore, Leetonia's performance index has increased seven points over the last five years which earned us a ranking of 13 out of 610 school districts.

The Leetonia School District continues to do what it can to help our area and Ohio remain a manufacturing leader. The school district approved a 10 - year tax abatement for a company in 2002 which brought over 40 jobs to the area. This company was purchased in 2012, and the new owners were awarded an additional five - year abatement by the school district. The district approved another 10 - year abatement for a 33 million dollar expansion

project in 2014. The company employs approximately 80 people and will be expanding that workforce this year.

As I mentioned earlier, Leetonia Schools are in Quintile one, 116th out of 610 districts in the state of Ohio. We received no replacement for TPP and received \$0 for the guarantee in FY 15. However, Leetonia will still lose money with this proposal. This budget proposal reduces funding to the Leetonia School District equal to roughly 1 mill each year. The district receives 68% of its funds from the state, and has done many things to be good stewards of that money. We have learned to live within our means, but we are now faced with a reduction that may be catastrophic. We hope you examine this formula and recognize the efforts of Leetonia Schools to be a role model for doing more with less for the greater good of the state and, more importantly, for the students of this amazing community.

In conclusion, the proposed budget will reduce two mills over two years from the Leetonia Exempted Village School District. Four other rural school districts with small student populations in Columbiana County will also see a reduction in funds. Leetonia is a close community that cares about its students, school district, each other and state. This is reflected by the recent resolution issued by the Leetonia Village Council stating their concern about the school funding budget proposal in HB 64 as well as our willingness to approve tax abatements for businesses. Leetonia, like many other rural communities graduates hard working productive citizens each year. Vice Admiral Tony Less who was the first commanding officer of the Blue Angels and Melissa Mancusso the head of the Fetal Treatment Center at the Akron Children's Hospital who received world recognition for delivering twins holding hands last summer are examples of just two of the many graduates from our school district. Leetonia as well as other schools with low student populations like those in Columbiana County are the backbone and spirit of our state, yet this budget reduces the funds to these schools.

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.

