

Chairman Hite, Vice-Chair Sykes and members of the Senate Finance – Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on a subject we are very passionate about - student transportation.

The limited growth of new state funding and in many cases no growth in funding has been a problem for most rural school districts. This year's proposed biennial budget is a major concern in the quest for increased revenue to meet the pressures of earned increases in salary steps and raises, increased employee health care costs, and the increase in the cost of doing business.

Now the new state budget as proposed by the Governor and supported by the House of Representatives reduces the reimbursement of transportation expenses from 50% to 37% and then 25% over the two-year period. This is a major concern to rural school districts that provide bus service covering a large number of square miles. One can honestly say the reduction is a concern for all school districts, but rural districts have a unique challenge. In addition to transporting the student body, districts must also provide transportation services for private and parochial school students, even when their start dates, closing dates, holiday closures, and school closings don't align. Extensive travel is required to service many vocational school programs that require travel over the width of the county.

It was just eight years ago the state had a reimbursement program for new school bus purchases to promote the safety of our school children and reduce the operational expenses of buses. When will the state offer a similar reimbursement program, since many districts now have buses with 200,000 or more miles of operation?

Four rural school districts in Southwestern Ohio have united to express our dissatisfaction with the lack of concern for the safety of our schoolchildren. We are four rural districts that must travel country roads to transport our schoolchildren. Reducing the reimbursement by 50% over the next two fiscal years is not an act that supports the safety of children. The Governor and the House of Representatives have recommended this reduction.

The Boards of Education for Edgewood School District, Talawanda School District, Ross Local School District, and Southwest Local School District ask the Senate to support our concern for the safety of our children, and remove the reimbursement reduction from the budget.

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