

Chairman Oelslager, Chairman Callender, Vice Chair Scherer, Rep. Cera, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Jodi Sourini and I'm the President of the Board of Education for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

My district has the heart-breaking distinction of being #1. In the state of Ohio, the children of my district are giving up the highest percentage of their state funding to pay for other children's private tuition via EdChoice. This has devastating consequences in terms of equality.

Nearly 1,800 students who live in our district are using the EdChoice voucher. 1,699 of those students (94.8%) of those students have never been enrolled in nor have attended our schools. This indicates that many of these students were NOT fleeing a failing school. They never intended on attending public school regardless what grade we receive on the state report card. Many in our community who choose private schools do so for cultural or religious reasons. We are a community that is proud to be diverse and inclusive. However, that has led to the fact that 91% of the students who use EdChoice in our district are white, while 83% of the children who attend the public schools of my district are minorities. These are just some of the reasons I support Sub. HB 305. Having a Fair School Funding Plan deeply concerns my district.

I support Sub. HB 305 because our state has needed a constitutional system of school funding since the 1997 *DeRolph* decision. If approved, and when fully funded, this legislation would solve the funding issues for school districts like mine and would provide equal educational opportunities for the children in my district and across Ohio.

The content of this legislation and the process for how it was developed are the reasons I support it. The legislation is based on the true costs to provide a quality education for children. This plan will bring predictability, fairness, and order to a dysfunctional system.

I commend Reps. Patterson, Speaker Cupp, and Rep. Scherer for leading a bi-partisan, information-driven, effort on how to best fund public education in Ohio. Their Fair School Funding Plan would enable all children, regardless of their zip code or their unique needs, to have access to a public school that has sufficient resources to provide a high-quality education that is appropriate for needs of the 21st century. I appreciate the work this team has done for nearly three years, despite the pandemic, and the commitment to fairness in this proposal. This is a fair and thoughtful piece of legislation. It needs to be acted on. Now.

The Fair School Funding Plan factors in property wealth, income, local capacity to fund the base cost, and considers the unique challenges that rural and urban school districts face. The plan thoughtfully addresses all of these needs. To be effective, this legislation must be adopted in total. As you assess the plan, please look at the whole picture and respect the integrated nature that makes it fair and equitable.

Most important in this proposed legislation for my district is the elimination of deduction funding for students who receive public funds to attend a school not operated by their district. Deduction funding increases inequality across communities, drives up an over-reliance on property taxes, and deprives our neediest students of essential state funding. Many in my community who choose non-public schools do so for religious and cultural reasons. The current deduction method of funding EdChoice is driving a seriously ugly situation in my community by pitting neighbors against each other. Ending deduction

funding and instead funding vouchers from a different line item in the budget is appropriate and essential to making the system fair.

Please act now. You have a unique opportunity to solve the school funding issue that's been unconstitutional in Ohio for nearly a quarter of a century. We need Fair School Funding as we tackle the both the educational and financial losses inflicted by the pandemic. The children of Ohio need Fair School Funding now.

While school districts urgently need the help provided by this legislation, I realize that it's not feasible to fully fund it in the next budget cycle. But phased in over six-years with substantial annual progress, is practical and achievable.

Our system of public schools is vital to Ohio's long-term economic growth. Our system of public schools is a worthy investment for our state's long-term viability.

Public schools are essential and worthy of the investment of our public funds.

I urge you to support Sub. HB 305 as introduced, and to act on it now.