



**Testimony of Stephen Dyer
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Chairman Terhar, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor and other distinguished members of the Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. As a former Chairman of your counterpart in the House, I feel I'm one of the few (if any) who will testify before you that knows exactly what you're going through right now. And I don't envy you. But let me try to help as you sort through the many things seen and unseen in this current version of the budget.

Additional Poverty-Based aid

I'm a fan of additional aid directed toward poverty, in general. However, I am not a fan of additional aid without future commitments. While these additional dollars will be helpful, I fear without their inclusion in some sort of formal model or other mechanism more permanent than a particular governor or general assembly's largesse, there's nothing preventing these additional resources from being simply removed/cut in the next biennial budget. For there's nothing adhering them to our students besides the doubled up Scotch tape that's been applied to the plan.

School Choice Stuff

There are several problematic school choice provisions that have been inserted into the House budget that cause me to scratch my head.

- 1) **Extended filing deadlines for the Cleveland voucher program.** This is simply meant to try to increase the number of students who can access the vouchers. However, this additional few months won't in actuality increase the number of students taking vouchers. Because if they want the voucher in January, they want it in September. All this additional deadline does is further fray the relationship between the school choice and traditional school district communities – a relationship that has been healing in recent years
- 2) **Loosening charter school sponsor oversight.** Quite frankly, I'm stunned by the provisions that would loosen state oversight of the long-ridiculed Ohio charter school sector. I don't get it. It's not like we're some paragons of charter school oversight right now. House Bill 2 was a nice first step, but it just brought us into the mainstream. It may have tamed the Wild, Wild West somewhat, but we're still a territory, not nearly ready for statehood. Why anyone would think that Ohio is ready to make it easier for dropout recovery schools to be designated high performing (EDUCD63), or remove the annual sponsor requirement of reporting whether any of a school's associates have been hit with a finding of recovery against them (EDUCD87), or that it's OK to drop from annual to quintennial reviews of sponsors who get Bs on their evaluations (UDUCD93), or let sponsors only have to give its 10 assurances its school can remain open just when they open, not in subsequent years, or make 3 consecutive years of failure be the closure



standard rather than 2 of 3 as it's been for a decade (EDUCD69)? Making it harder to close failing charter schools while easing up on sponsors – the oversight of which was the cause of so much national ridicule for so many years – makes no sense. We should continue the work that's been started to strengthen, not weaken, oversight of this sector that gave us the billion dollar ECOT boondoggle, among other scandals. It was only 5 years ago that the Akron Beacon Journal looked at 4,263 state audits and found that “charter schools misspend public money nearly four times more often than any other type of taxpayer-funded agency.”

State takeover

I'm all for changing HB 70. That bill was doomed to fail, and I'm glad that people are recognizing that fact. Finally. I would simply urge you to continue working with local communities to determine how best to craft a better plan for persistently struggling school districts – including examining alternative success measures beyond the highly-correlated-to-poverty standardized test scores.

FAFSA completion

This is also something I've talked about in the Higher Education Subcommittee. But I want to commend the House for inserting this provision into the budget. And while I would urge more financial support for these efforts (I know, shocking, right?), what's clear is that increasing FAFSA completion rates – especially among those students most underrepresented in our higher education institutions is among the cheapest, most effective economic development tools we have. Increasing our rate by a mere 5 percent will have tremendous economic benefits to our state. And if we use the funding to provide a statewide impetus for local communities to piggyback on those efforts, we will be in line with what most research indicates – a state, local and philanthropic collaboration is the best way to improve our FAFSA completion rate.

Cupp Patterson

Much of your work is dominated by what's NOT in the budget – the Fair Funding, or Cupp Patterson education funding model and plan. And while a version of this did not make it into the House version of the budget, I would urge you to consider inserting it into the budget if the plan makes it over here through a standalone bill.

There were a few issues with the model – primarily on its distributive properties. But I want to assure everyone on this panel that those issues can be fixed and are actively being addressed. And without exotic patches or anything. In fact, I have been working with others concerned about these initial simulations to help improve them. Suffice it to say, given what the Speaker of the House has said about the plan, if a version makes it out of that chamber, the concerns regarding its distribution to rural and urban poor kids will be addressed.

I would urge all of you to give serious consideration to this plan. Because it's a formulaic fix to the problem the current budget patches over. Nearly a year and a half of work went into this effort. Many in the education community have worked to ensure that the two tenets of the



DeRolph case are addressed – developing a formula based on student need and distributing the state’s resources fairly to districts that are in most need as well as those which are not.

I’m happy to talk about any aspect of the plan you’d like to discuss. But I won’t take up any more of your time than necessary. And while I have a few nits to pick about it (student-teacher ratios, specialist teacher calculations, etc.), I think if the distribution is fixed, it would bring us as close to a formula that actually calculates student need better than any we’ve had in at least a decade. We need to get this right and this effort may be our last real shot for another decade.

Ten years ago, I was in the exact position you were, only then we were hemorrhaging \$250 million a month in revenue at the height of the Great Recession. To give you an idea of how long ago that was, my 4th grader, Carson, was born that year and my oldest son, Logan, had yet to start Kindergarten. Logan starts high school this fall.

Don’t let another generation go through an unconstitutionally funded school funding system. You are in a far superior position today to get this right than I ever was.

So do it.

No pressure.

And if you need any help or suggestions, or want a sounding board, please do reach out. I want you to succeed. Because if you do, our kids will succeed. And that’s the whole point.