



FINANCE COMMITTEE

WITNESS FORM

COMMITTEE DATE: June 3, 2020

NAME: Dalton Summers

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ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING: River View Local School District

TESTIFYING ON BILL NUMBER: SB 313

TESTIMONY TYPE: WRITTEN

TESTIFYING AS: PROPONENT

FOR BUDGET TESTIMONY ONLY:

TESTIMONY TOPIC: EDUCATION

TESTIFYING ON BUDGET ITEM(S):

DID YOU TESTIFY IN A SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE? NO

ARE YOU A REGISTERED LOBBYIST? NO

SPECIAL REQUESTS:

- SUBMIT -

Written testimony is a public record and may be posted on the Ohio Senate's website.



River View Local School District

"Building Educational Excellence for Tomorrow. . . Today"

Office of the Superintendent

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Testimony for SB 313

Submitted by:

Dalton Summers

Superintendent, River View Local School District

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of proposed adjustments to SB 313 as submitted by Howard Fleeter and the Ohio School Boards Association. I would have much rather had the opportunity to deliver this testimony in person, however with the current challenges facing my district and multiple issues facing us all, I have unfortunately had to submit this in writing. I welcome any further questions about our story at River View Local so please reach out to me through email, phone, or even a visit. I would be glad to speak in further detail or answer any questions you may have.

I have had the opportunity to testify on several pieces of legislation throughout my career and typically those testimonies have been to support bills that would benefit not just my own district but several districts in my region or of similar demographics. This particular plea today is primarily a cry for specific help to assist the students and community of the River View Local School District.

River View is a large rural school district of about 2000 students. We cover 376 square miles in Coshocton, Licking, and Muskingum counties. Our median income is in the mid \$30,000 range with the average being just slightly higher. Unemployment is usually ranked in the upper percentages for Ohio. Our community is known mostly for agricultural value and high counts of whitetail deer taken each year. So, if you were to visit our district you would probably not associate wealth and prosperity with what you see. We are, however, a community that has boasted a great school system for many years with better than average academic accomplishments and successful outcomes. Up until about 3 years ago, we benefited from the revenue we were able to gain from our coal burning power plant. It was this revenue that kept us running and supported our unique geographical challenges.

In 2017, we were informed that our power plant was devalued and we began losing over one million dollars a year in local revenue. Knowing that the plant was slated to close in May of 2020 and recognizing that we were going to continue to remain flat funded by the state, the Board turned to the community to replace the already lost revenue as well as the projected 1.2 million dollar loss still to come. In total, we are now losing over 2.2 million a year in local revenue as a result of the full closure of this plant. We attempted a .75% traditional income tax to try to generate at least 2 million dollars in revenue. An income tax levy was attempted because we knew based on incomes, unemployment, and historical data that our community simply could not pass any additional property taxes. Over 60% of our registered voters are 60+ years old. Many are lifelong residents of the community who no longer have a direct family connection to our district and view our district through the same lens from 30 years ago. Additionally, most in that age range are living on fixed incomes. Despite the work to educate and inform the community of our current reality, the income tax failed in both the Fall of 2019 and this past primary election in the Spring of 2020. We immediately responded and just completed the process of laying off 10% of our teaching staff and multiple non-teaching positions. We closed one of our elementary buildings and will likely close at least one more with more layoffs scheduled for next year as we are needing to reduce another million dollars in expenditures.

To add to this hardship, you can imagine our frustration and disappointment when we recently learned that over 5% of our state share money has been cut. Five percent is almost double what surrounding districts experienced; this is because we are considered "wealthy" due to our capacity and because of a power plant that permanently closed on May 27, 2020. Explaining this concept to any population is impossible because it is irrational and irresponsible. Our reality is this: in the past year we have lost over 1 million in local funding, \$427,000 in State funding over two months time, and are projected to lose another 1.2 million in local funding now that the power plant is closed. We will, in all likelihood, lose additional state funding for next school year. While we are laying off employees, cutting programs, increasing fees, and removing student opportunities, we are still having more and more of what little state revenue we do get reduced or completely taken away. River View needs your immediate help.

From what I understand, SB 313 was developed to assist those districts who were facing financial hardships because of the unfortunate closures of power plant facilities. It appears that it would help a few, however in its current form, somehow River View does not, once again, rise to the level of dire straits necessary for any additional state support. I hope the little bit of detail I provided above convinces you otherwise and supports the notion that we are in need of immediate support and assistance. Mr. Fleeter's proposed amendments would allow RV to receive at least some token of support from the state based on our 11.8% loss in PUTPP from just 2017-2019. The proposal would not harm any of the districts receiving assistance from 313 but could provide River View and two additional districts some much needed financial aid for a minimal increase to the original SB 313 plan.

This proposed assistance will not fix all of River View's problems. As a local community, we will still have to accept the challenges in front of us and accept our responsibility to support our local schools. Having said this, in light of the recognition that the system we have does not work and that it is clear that we are in need of any state support we can get because of the unfortunate closure of our coal burning plant, I ask that you please consider the modified proposal to SB 313. We are not a "wealthy" district. There is a clear flaw in the concept of "capacity wealth" based on inflated property values. The funding model that is used to determine our state support is proven to be ineffective. We need your immediate support and consideration for this immediate need

Thank you all for your willingness to consider any way to recognize our legitimate struggles and your commitment to assist the students of our great district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dalton Summers".

Dalton Summers
Superintendent, RVLSD
(dalton.summers@rvbears.org)