

Testimony on HB110 (Appropriations for FY 2022-23 Budget)
Submitted to the Ohio Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee,

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by Josephine Moore, 2248 Stillman Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 44118

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Fair School Funding Plan in HB110.

My name is Josie Moore. I am a proud resident of Cleveland Heights and parent of a fourth-grader, a second-grader, and soon-to-be preschooler in the Cleveland Heights–University Heights public schools. When my husband and I researched the many schools available in our area, we chose to send our children to the public schools because they offer not only the academic and extracurricular richness we want for our children, but also because of the cultural diversity that we would be a part of in our unique district. Public education aligns with our family’s deeply held values, and this is why we, along over 88 percent of Ohio families, choose public education for our children.

I want to share with you today a story that solidified for me the vital importance of our public schools and the necessity of ensuring a full spectrum of services for our children. Before the pandemic, I was tutoring kindergarteners one-on-one as part of an early intervention literacy tutoring program for Roxboro Elementary. While working with one child, I showed him a card with a lowercase T and asked him to give me the letter sound. Instead, he told me, “It looks like a coffin. It looks like the coffin they put my dad in.” I paused. I didn’t know what to do or say. I had received basic instruction in helping kids identify letters and act out their sounds. I did not have the training for this. We moved onto the next letter, I got through the rest of the session, and afterward, I went to the school’s literacy specialist. As soon as I said the child’s name, she stopped me and said, “We know. He has full, wrap-around services. He’s getting extra academic help, and he’s working with our social worker, our counselor, and the school psychologist. We’re taking care of him.”

Now, we know that every public dollar invested in quality early education programs yields, conservatively, a return of \$7 in tax revenue over the long term, and when that investment is sustained over the educational career of every student in a community, the benefits only increase. We also know that while many people talk about education as something that benefits the individual, a dynamic educational infrastructure results in a ripple effect of positive outcomes for our entire community, including lower crime rates, fewer households in poverty, improved public health, higher property values, increased commercial activity, and increased tax revenue.

So when the literacy specialist told me that this boy was getting the care, intervention, and attention he needed, I felt a wave of relief and gratitude. Not only because I was happy he was being taken care of, but also because I understand the costs when communities neglect the needs of their most vulnerable children. Just as a robust public educational system yields wide-reaching positive impacts, when we fail to meet our responsibilities to our community’s children, we pay the costs over the long term.

But our current funding model is hurting our schools’ ability to provide the kind of academic, social, emotional, and physical supports many of Ohio’s districts’ kids need. As you know, in Ohio, EdChoice vouchers affect 140 out of the state’s 610 districts. Of these, 22 districts pay out 90 percent of the vouchers. And of those, ALL are majority poverty, and 19 out of 22—including the Cleveland Heights–University Heights district—are majority students of color. The siphoning of resources from our public

schools—from the children in our community who need these resources the MOST—not only fails to meet our state’s constitutional duties; it is also morally wrong and is compounding future costs for our cities and our state.

But we can fix this. We can honor the educational choice of over 88 percent of families in the state of Ohio. We can invest in long-term social and economic benefits. We can meet our moral and constitutional responsibilities to ALL of the children in our state.

You have taken an oath to uphold our state’s constitution, and this means that our legislature must fund our system of public schools so that they can provide equitable education and care to meet the diverse needs of every student in every district, regardless of the community’s capacity to fund its public schools. Meeting this constitutional obligation is at the core of your responsibility as an elected representative of our citizens.

The best time to fix our broken system of funding our public education was in 1997, after the DeRolph ruling. The second best time to fix it is now.

Thank you.