

Proponent Testimony of Howie Beigelman | Substitute Bill HB 110: State Operating Budget for FY 22-23
Ohio Senate | Committee on Finance
Columbus, OH | June 4, 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee:

Ohio Jewish Communities is the statewide government advocacy, public affairs, and community outreach voice of Ohio's eight Jewish federations and their some 150 member agencies providing cradle-to-grave social services and meeting vital human needs of Ohioans of all faiths – and of none – each day, all across Ohio. We submit this testimony today on their behalf as well.

Background

We believe there are many important, and positive, aspects of the Operating Budget legislation, both in the Governor's draft, in the House version, and now in the Senate's current take, Substitute HB 110. Without detailing each and every issue on which we, our individual communities, and our agencies advocated for, we specifically note with gratitude the full funding of the Nonprofit Security Grants at \$8.5 million maintained throughout, as well as the House and Senate each adding in funding, now totaling \$400,000, for the Ohio Holocaust & Genocide Memorial & Education Commission. With antisemitic violence surging, including a swastika on the University of Toledo campus just this week as well as two guilty pleas in terror plots against Jewish community targets in Toledo and Youngstown, security funding can't come soon enough. Nor can we delay the efforts of the Holocaust & Genocide Commission any longer.

However, there are a few specific policy needs we wanted to raise with you that we hope can be addressed before the final vote in the Senate.

Education Funding

Jewish communities have opened schools in Nazi ghettos and under the watchful eye of communist secret police. Our commitment to education is a principled one. As the late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has written *"...freedom is won, not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena, nor in the courts, national or international, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a country you need an army. But to defend a free society you need schools. You need families and an educational system in which ideals are passed on from one generation to the next, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. So Jews became the people whose passion was education, whose citadels were schools and whose heroes were teachers."*¹

So we commend both the House and the Senate for their work on creating a new, fairer school funding formula. Based on our Jewish values, we support quality education for all. And that includes traditional public schools, charter (or community) schools, chartered nonpublic schools, and other educational options.

We believe there is much common ground in the proposals, especially regarding nonpublic schools. Wherever negotiations take both chambers, we urge you to maintain the Senate's language regarding transportation of nonpublic school students, of payments in lieu of transportation, and regarding the state's direct funding of both the school choice scholarships and auxiliary services.

¹ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, Bo - Freedom's Defense, January 14, 2013

We also support the Senate's addition of a new tuition tax credit scholarship program. Other states across the country have long used such programs (including Arizona, Florida, and Pennsylvania), and they have proven to be both a wise use of tax policy as well as one that has much bipartisan support. Florida's Legislative Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability found in a study of their state's program that it saved taxpayers \$1.49 for every \$1.00 of the tax credit.²

As we have already said, while our advocacy is focused on our community's nonpublic schools, we advocate for a quality education for all. Therefore, the only change we would request regarding the tax credit scholarship program is that you enlarge it, like the Arizona and Pennsylvania programs, to include public schools as well. In those states it is used by public schools to pay for extracurricular activities, tutoring, and other items.

Youngstown Mobile Meals

Beginning in the pandemic, the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation began a new mobile meals program serving those throughout the community who needed fresh, healthy, and readymade meals. The need has not abated and as they are looking for ways to fund the program sustainably into the future, they are asking the state to help them bridge that gap.

The funding request is a modest one, at \$50,000 per year over the biennium, totaling \$100,000. But those funds leverage thousands of meals to those in need across the Mahoning Valley.

Cincinnati Hillel

In past years, the state has funded mental health services through Cincinnati Hillel, which oversees Jewish student services at several college campuses across the region. Over the course of the pandemic such needs have only risen. Despite the increased need, recognizing the pandemic has created a strain on budgeting, they are asking for a flat-funded continuation of their \$28,000 per year, or \$56,000 funding.

Conclusion

We are ready to work with you on each of these requests and on other opportunities within the budget to positively impact the lives of Ohioans statewide. We are happy to provide additional information and to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit this testimony today.

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Howie Beigelman, Executive Director

² OPPAGA Report 08-68, December 2008, <https://oppaga.fl.gov/Documents/Reports/08-68.pdf>