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Interested Party Testimony – HB 33

House Finance Committee Hearing

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Presented by Susan Kaeser, LWVO Issue Specialist

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Chairman Edwards, Vice Chairman LaRe , Ranking Member Sweeney, my name is Susie Kaeser and I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with the committee about HB 12 at this important stage of the legislative process. I live in Cleveland Heights, my children were educated in our public schools, and I have been an advocate for public education and its role in our democracy and as a resource for equal opportunity, for more than 40 years. For the last three years I have served as an education specialist for the League of Women Voters Ohio.

The state budget expresses what we care about as a state. As you shape this two—year values document, the LWVO urges you to make public education a priority.

As you decide how to invest in education, it is important to make public education the priority.

Education choices outside the public system do not benefit everyone, are not accountable, and need not be honest or true. They satisfy individual preferences, but do not serve the common good. This is the unique and critical role and contribution of our public system. That’s why it’s in the Constitution that our legislators need to make this system strong. Public education is the foundation for self-governance, for democracy.

For public education to provide the education that will prepare our graduates for the 21st century workplace that many of your colleague find to be their priority, or for the decisions that our citizens must be able to make in our shrinking world, or that will keep people from leaving our state, our public schools need adequate resources – all of our public schools. That includes public schools in our rural communities where public education is the only universally available education option, and the one that can least afford to lose children or funds because of private education.

The best way to do invest in high quality public education is to readopt the funding method defined in the Fair School Funding plan and fully fund it in this budget.

The legislature is to be commended for recognizing the merits of the Cupp-Patterson plan that has been vetted over many years and sessions of this body. Our state is diverse and so are the conditions and needs of individual school districts. The ability to solve the puzzle of ensuring that every community would be fairly treated is nothing short of a miracle. It’s a great plan.

Let’s use it to make equity and adequacy a reality. That means putting in all the dollars that bring every community the funds that mean their schools can deliver a high quality education. There is no need to wait.

The architects of the plan and the public school leaders who live each day with the reality of the first installment of the six year phase in of the plan have identified modifications that would bolster the benefits of the formula by using more up to date data for calculating cost. They know what they are talking about, and I hope you will support their ideas.

These changes point out another unfinished piece of the fair school funding puzzle, the existence of an impartial body that can review conditions that would help fine-tune and update the formula. This is critical to keeping the plan on track.

Finally, categorical aid is critical to equity. It's important that the recommendations of the cost studies that you funded be incorporated in the budget. DPIA funding was the last to be included during the phase-in, and should be the first in the next round of funding increases.

Every student deserves a high quality education, and every community that benefits from those well educated graduates deserves a funding system that is fair to them. These are essential goals for funding education and can be achieved with this long overdue remedy to funding public education.

Education is about democracy. We hope you will invest in our future by investing in this core democratic institution – our public schools.