

23 February 2023

To: Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, Ohio House of Representatives  
Chair: Representative Tracy Richardson

Dear Representative Richardson,

I am presenting my written testimony on H.B. 33 (FY2023-2024 Operating Budget) and request that it might be included as part of public testing on the hearing on March 7 on the topic of fair school funding.

I wish to respectfully testify that my daughter's public education is suffering because of Ohio's outdated and unconstitutional funding model. My daughter attends Kramer Elementary in the Talawanda School District in Butler County. Despite the best efforts of devoted parents, staff, and teachers, citizens in our district voted against a tax levy to increase school funding in November of 2022. Local taxpayers are increasingly upset about the current funding model. And the Talawanda School District is no exception. Levies are failing across the state and taxpayers are fed up.

As I'm sure you know, Ohio's current model of public school funding was deemed unconstitutional in the DeRolph Case in 1997, which clearly stated that the current funding model is unconstitutional, flawed, and provided unequal educational opportunities to Ohio students. The over reliance on property tax is unconstitutional. A solution to the current inadequate model is a base foundational funding model where each student in Ohio will receive the same amount of money. The Talawanda School District is proposing \$9,000 per pupil based upon the state average of \$11,306 per public operating expense (according to the ODE Report Card 2021-22).

If meaningful action is not taken, education at my daughter's school and the district will suffer because of the lack of state funding. The district has been forced to implement Pay to Play fees, which makes extracurricular activities only available to those who can afford it. Teacher salaries are embarrassingly low. Art and Music programs are being cut. Schools and grade levels are being reorganized to save money. School day schedules are being shortened. Busing will be eliminated for high school students.

And while our district is agonizing over scraps, the Ohio legislature is developing ways to expand private school vouchers. The education system in Ohio is being hijacked by the few, while the majority of students and families in Ohio are being underserved.

Investing in our children and their education used to be a priority in Ohio. But over the past two decades Ohio, once ranked in the top 10 in the nation, has fallen behind. All Ohio students should receive the best education possible.

I can't imagine something more important to invest in. In my opinion, it is the most important purpose of state government—to invest in our children and financially support our schools. A base foundational funding model is the solution to our current grave problems and we need our legislators to pay attention to what is happening to our schools and solve this issue. Simply put, I will not vote for any legislator who does not make public education the #1 priority for Ohio.

With gratitude for your attention,  
Pepper Stetler, parent  
Talawanda School  
Butler County  
Oxford, Ohio