

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 3/21/2023

Name: John V. Barbo

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): _____

Position/Title: Teacher

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB33

Specific Issue: Fair School Funding Plan

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5-10 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position: As a teacher and parent, I believe Ohio's public school students need a system of funding schools that is fair and equitable and takes into consideration the differences from one district to another. I believe the FSFP accomplishes this and should be fully implemented.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

Chairwoman Richardson, ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for hearing my public testimony on House Bill 33.

My name is John Barbo. I am currently in my 24th year of teaching at Geneva High School in Ashtabula County. My wife Nancy also teaches at Geneva High School, and my 15 -year-old son is a proud Geneva Eagle. I am also a coach, Science Department Chairperson, city councilperson, and Union Representative. I have come here today to testify in support of the Fair School Funding Plan.

It is important that I take a moment to thank the legislature for including the Fair School Funding Plan in the current biennium budget and phasing in the first two years. The more I learn about this plan, the more excited I am about it and the better I feel about the future of public education in Ohio.

In 1997 the *DeRolph v. State of Ohio* ruling determined that Ohio's method for funding schools was unconstitutional. Since that time, Ohio's solution to satisfy the Ohio Supreme Court's order has been to pass a series of budgets containing politically expedient remedies that have not eliminated the over-reliance on local property tax or mitigated the discriminatory nature inherent in the series of "funding fixes" legislated over the last 23 years.

Thankfully, in 2017, Speaker of the House Bob Cupp and Representative John Patterson put together a work group composed of superintendents and treasurers from all regions of Ohio representing all school types. The "Cupp-Patterson Workgroup" as it is called developed a funding plan that answers the questions: "What does it cost to educate a child in the state of Ohio?" and "What does each district need to operate?" The result of this group effort is the Fair School Funding Plan.

The Fair School Funding Plan is a data-driven, equitable, well thought out solution to the problem of funding schools in Ohio. It is built keeping the needs of the students and schools at the forefront. It is based on research, best practices, and demonstrable successes. Every dollar can be traced to an identifiable component. It is based on what schools and students actually need, and it recognizes the fact that every school district in the state is unique. I believe that the Fair School Funding Plan should be a permanent solution to the issue of funding schools. The fact that this plan is a bipartisan effort makes it all the more impressive.

Beyond base funding, the state must take into account the critical needs that impact some districts more than others. One thing that always stood out to me was that despite the disparity between school districts we are all rated on the same playing field. The Fair School Funding Plan cannot completely level the playing field, but it at least guarantees that all school districts are treated equally and fairly financially.

The Fair School Funding Plan will give district treasurers a greater ability to predict what a district's finances will look like in the future and make it easier to prepare dependable financial forecasts. It will also take into account the individual situations of each school district, factoring the number of students enrolled in each grade, the number of special needs students, the ability of the community to provide financially, and other factors.

I am not a school finance expert, but my experiences as a classroom teacher and parent make me an expert on what students need to succeed and the importance of public education to the future of this country. In my two-plus decades of teaching, I have seen first-hand the consequences of the previous method of funding school districts.

Right now, our district operates with a skeleton crew compared to the level of staffing we once enjoyed. Several years ago, we came perilously close to having to make extremely draconian cuts that would have been devastating to our students. Thankfully, in the 2018-19 school year, we were able to pass an income tax that now covers the gap in funding. Another example of how the inconsistency of the prior method of school funding impacted Geneva Schools occurred ten years ago when our state funding was reduced by \$1.4 million in one biennium, and we were already a district with revenues and expenditures per pupil in the lowest 20% across the state. The Fair School Funding Plan will put an end to surprise cuts like that. Like many school districts, the state portion of our budget has steadily decreased and we have been forced to ask our residents to fund more and more of our daily operations. Thankfully, despite the fact that it is a sacrifice for many of our residents, they have supported our district and our students.

In politics, compromise is the word. And because of that, it seems we often end up with legislation that just barely accomplishes what it was meant to do. The Fair School Funding Plan, however, breaks that mold. It is a piece of legislation that is smart, data-driven, flexible, fair, and clearly accomplishes what its authors set out to do.

I am thankful that the first two years of this plan have been implemented. It is imperative, however, that the legislators in this state prove their commitment to the 1.6 million public school students in Ohio by continuing the phase-in for years 3 and 4 and work toward full funding of the plan. I personally have had enough of the budgetary

bandaids school districts have been forced to work with for the past twenty-plus years. It is time to put this era of funding schools behind us, and embrace the Fair School Funding Plan.

I am lucky to be a teacher. Every day I am blessed to work with outstanding teachers and amazing students. I believe in the transformative power of education, and specifically, public education. Every day in schools across this state, we address the needs of our students. For some, it means preparing them for a career in medicine, law, engineering, teaching, or finance. For others, it means addressing their most basic and pressing daily needs, such as providing a meal, school supplies, clothing, and counseling. This discussion is about more than budgets and legislation. It is about making a commitment to each and every child who attends our public schools.

I believe the Fair School Funding Plan is a major step in the right direction in funding our schools in a transparent, equitable manner, and I urge you to fully implement this plan.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

John V. Barbo.