



Interested Party Testimony on HB 33
Written Testimony
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Submitted by Carrie Arblaster
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Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 33.

I am Carrie Arblaster, Vice President of Public Policy at Philanthropy Ohio, a statewide association whose mission is to lead and equip Ohio philanthropy to be effective partners for change in their communities. We work to build the skills, knowledge, and connections among grantmaking organizations, helping them to become more strategic and efficient in their efforts to support nonprofits and communities. Our nearly 200 members collectively hold more than \$30 billion in assets and in 2020 invested over \$1.9 billion in their communities.

Our members – particularly those who engage in our health, education, and tax public policy Initiatives – are strong partners and co-investors with the state in improving the education, health and prosperity of all Ohioans. Since its creation in 2006, Philanthropy Ohio's Education Initiative has asserted that every child – regardless of zip code, gender, or race – deserves an education that leads to successful employment in the 21st century economy. To that end, we have partnered closely with the Ohio Department of Education and the State Board of Education on several important projects.

Philanthropy Ohio and our members were very pleased with many of the education related provisions in the executive budget. We believe this Governor's budget lays a strong foundation for Ohio's education system. In our testimony today I will be focusing on our support for the full implementation the Cupp-Patterson school funding plan. Additionally, we have one item that we would like to see amended into HB 33.

Full implementation of Cupp-Patterson

Philanthropy Ohio believes that the state's school funding system should be anchored in adequacy, predictability and equity. We ask the legislature to continue making significant investments in K-12 education, particularly for students of color, those living in low-income households or rural areas and those with other needs.



We know how to fund the plan is challenging and that the role of the legislature is to balance numerous, critical needs through the careful and thoughtful allocation of funds so that they can be sustained over the long term. To better understand the cost of an education, in 2021, Philanthropy Ohio urged the General Assembly to create a commission to study what it would cost to educate those needing categorical assistance and to complete a study that included actionable recommendations for priorities and funding levels by December 2022.

In late 2022, the Ohio Department of Education released several education cost studies. Of those studies, we believe the special education and English Learners are especially important to fully implement. Additionally, an independent report released earlier this year by OEPI offers a preliminary analysis of the costs to serve students from economically disadvantaged circumstance. While we are pleased by the release of these studies, we believe additional research is needed on what it costs educate economically disadvantaged students.

Finally, it is important to remember that the Cupp-Patterson Fair School Funding Plan was created through a multi-stakeholder process with input from policy makers, educators, finance experts and community members.

We have made progress towards providing an equitable education for all of Ohio's learners under the Fair School Funding Plan. To abandon it now would be disruptive and take us in the wrong direction.

We urge you to support the continued, full implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan and to ensure that adequate investments are made to fully phase in all elements of the plan in the state's FY 2024-25 operating budget.

Recommendations:

Funding should be flexible enough for local decision making and to accommodate multiple learning instructional models and programs.

The plan should provide a reporting mechanism where the Ohio Department of Education collects, analyzes and releases information on the impacts that significant new investments make over time.

Require the department to conduct an independent comprehensive study on the cost to educate students who are economically disadvantaged.



Additional recommendation:

Universal School Meals

Philanthropy Ohio is a proud member of Hunger-Free Schools Ohio, a campaign whose mission is to ensure that all Ohio students have access to school meals.

One in six children in Ohio faces hunger and 40.3% of households receiving SNAP benefits have children. ***In the 2019-2020 school year over two-thirds of the school lunches served here in Ohio were either free or at a reduced price.*** The need is real, and an urgent response is essential.

The reality is many families in Ohio are facing a hunger crisis. With the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency families are seeing their SNAP benefits decreased as the cost the food continues to rise. For some of our youngest citizens, school is the only reliable place they can receive a meal.

Bottom line is hungry kids can't learn. So, what can we do to ensure that every student in Ohio has the same opportunity to learn when they arrive to their classroom? We can feed them.

Who currently qualifies for free or reduced meals?

The maximum income for a family of two to qualify for a free school meal is 130% FPL or \$23,803. The maximum income for a family of two to qualify for a reduced-price meal is 185% FPL or \$33,874. According to the MIT living wage calculator the living wage for a family of two in the state of Ohio (1 adult, 1 child) is \$70,491.20. As you can see, there is a substantial gap (\$36,617.20) between those qualifying for free and reduced lunches versus and what is required to have an adequate standard of living. We need to close this gap and ensure all young learners have access to a healthy meal.

What are other states doing?

According to a report published by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), 35 states and the District of Columbia provide some degree of state funding towards school meals. Currently, 29 states have passed legislation addressing other food access related issues including unpaid fees and outreach programs. Additionally, the USDA



has set a maximum reimbursement rate for those states who provide supplemental funds to their school meal program. **Currently, Ohio does not provide supplemental funds and therefore does not receive the maximum reimbursement.**

What are we asking?

We urge the legislature to fund school meals to the maximum extent possible. Investing in our youngest citizens is an investment in our future. Children and teenagers who are hungry cannot reach their full potential in the classroom. When this happens, they lose, and we lose. To successfully grow we need educated citizens who are well positioned to contribute to their families, to their community and to the Ohio economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Should you have any questions or concerns please contact me directly.