

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Braxton James Simmons, and I am a student at The School of Creative and Performing Arts in Cincinnati Public Schools.

I have been attending this school for twelve years, and I'm involved in various youth civic engagement and leadership programs, and I am currently serving as the vice president of the student council, having previously been our President. My goal is to continue to serve my community, including through elected office, maybe even one day as the President of the United States.

I am here today to request that you fully and fairly fund our public schools. School funding is crucial to providing every student with equal opportunities to succeed. Schools like The School of Creative and Performing Arts often need more resources than other traditional academic schools, both because of our student population and the focus of our schools, so a smaller share of funding relative to our needs affects the quality of education and the overall development of students. I promise you, there is no better investment you can make in Ohio than an investment in students like us.

I am passionate about education and believe every student should access the same class options, extracurricular activities, and sports as other schools to explore their interests, develop their skills, and engage with their peers. Inadequate funding negatively impacts schools and students, creating an unfair advantage for wealthier school districts. By advocating for equal funding, we can level the playing field and provide all students with the tools they need to succeed.

Additionally, to address the issue of student mental health - one which I see the need for every day -, I have worked with Ranking Member Isaacsohn and students across my district to meet on Saturdays and talk through what we think kids need. Together we developed a policy we believe will help other students. We came up with the "help kids make more friends" amendment, which aims to allocate student wellness dollars towards increasing in-school time for socializing and electives.

Strong social skills and mental health are key components of achieving academic success. As someone who has experienced mental health issues, I understand the importance of a supportive community and a sense of belonging. Students need opportunities to make friends and build connections, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. It's not always easy to do that after school, and it can be close to impossible sometimes to find time during the school day, so we're proposing to make it more a part of everyday.

Investing in adequate resources for schools like The School of Creative and Performing Arts and Cincinnati Public Schools benefits the students and the community as a whole. These schools produce talented individuals who become successful artists, musicians, actors, and

performers, as well as doctors, nurses, and loving parents, and investing in them helps build a brighter future for us all.

In conclusion, I appreciate the committee's consideration and invite you all to attend a performance at our school sometime. The arts play a vital role in education, fostering creativity and self-expression in students. Thank you for listening to my advocacy for equal funding and student wellness for our public schools.