

Opponent Testimony
For the Ohio House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee
April 25, 2023

From
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We'd like to thank the House Ways and Means Committee, and Chair of the Committee Bill Roemer, for this time to offer opponent testimony on House Bill 1. We represent the Talawanda School District in southwest Ohio, a district with around 3,000 students in one of the largest districts, in terms of square miles, in the state (ranked 63). Our district is also home to Miami University, one of Ohio's strongest public universities and an important stakeholder in our region, and state.

SB 1 has a tremendous price tag, one that will be paid for by local citizens. This bill will increase the burdens of local tax-payers for government services, including public education, according to all estimates and analysis. Our voters already shoulder **67%** of the revenue we must generate to support our schools, and our November 2022 levy loss is a strong indicator that taxpayers are fed up with tax increases. It will increase even more of the public education tax burden onto the local community tax payers. Our voters — despite valuing our public schools and education in general – are saying NO to these increases.

Talawanda schools were formed by a state consolidation program in the 1950s. Our school district is the 63rd largest of 611 districts in the state of Ohio. We have a national university (Miami University) located in what otherwise feels more like a rural district.

Our local history means Talawanda is lucky enough to have a rich diversity of cultures and families, and a lot of support for our schools. We have wealthy families, low income families and everything in between. We have generations of farm families as well as people working at Miami University from all corners of the world. All of these families want an excellent education for their children. They want strong opportunities for their children, and want the very best for them. Our citizens support our schools...but not all have the means, or desire, to pay extra property taxes to fund that education. This is especially true as our national population ages, as voters without school-aged children have fewer reasons to support school levies, and as inflation causes our costs, but not wages, to rise. In our community slightly less than 20% of the residents have a school aged child in their home.

Talawanda delivers a terrific educational experience. We meet or exceed all areas in state report card standards, with a graduation rate of 96.6%. Our state assessments are in the top third in Ohio. We have school social workers, school counselors, SROs, Instructional leaders and coaches, a plethora of after school activities to develop leadership, academic, and citizen skills (FFA, FCCLA, Athletics, Marching Band, Choir, Foreign Language, Chess, Mock Trial, and others), and a comprehensive STEM, Gifted, Workforce employment, Alternative School, Parent Planning, Wellness Coordinator, Advance Placement, CCP, Focused Interventions, Restorative Practices to educate our staff and students, and other programs/services that ODE and our legislators want every school district to implement. We are delivering a high quality education that helps every single child reach their potential, as Governor DeWine states is his goal. These programs cost an average of \$11,870 per

pupil in our district (ODE Report Card Data). The state Guarantee is, at present, \$2,500 per student and this is what Talawanda receives. The local taxpayers provide the lion's share of the cost to educate students in this community.

Through careful fiscal management, we have operated our school district for 18.5 years without any additional operating levies. Instead we have passed capital bonds and have successfully passed an income tax increase to help us balance our budgets.

We now are at a point where the state share, the Ohio funding model, and the overreliance on property tax has produced a situation that will no longer be supported by our taxpayers.

Since November 2022, when our levy failed, we have been executing budget cuts in a three year plan. We've cut high school busing next year (in the third largest school district in OH), and in years 2 and 3, positions such as school counselors, art/ music teachers, gifted teachers, SROs, and coaches. We will start losing families to other, wealthier districts. This is a shame!

If our voters won't support public education revenue increases NOW, why would they support them when the burden on local tax-payers is even greater after HB 1 takes effect?

HB 1 will only make worse the over-reliance on local property taxes that were deemed unconstitutional by the DeRolph decision, by the Ohio Supreme Court, in 1997. Twenty five years after that decision, our middle class families are struggling to pay taxes and make ends meet. Our neighboring school districts are in a similar plight (Ross Local, Edgewood, Madison). The overreliance on property tax, even with the proposed Fair School Funding model, is hurting districts like Talawanda, which is especially hampered by the amount of un-taxable property in our district owned by Miami University.

Our constituents are saying enough is enough. It is time to stop expecting local communities to pay even more money to support a high quality public education. HB 1 punishes local government and local school districts.

Please vote NO on this HB 1. Please fix our long-standing school funding which places undue pressure on localities.