

Testimony

Provided to the Ohio Senate Education Committee

INTERESTED PARTY

HB 33: Establishes operating appropriations for fiscal years 2024-2025

PROVIDED BY:

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Talawanda School District, Oxford, Ohio

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Chairman Brenner and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to share my perspective on House Bill 33 and the Fair School Funding Formula. I am a parent of two students in the Talawanda School District in Oxford, Ohio; I am also an alumnus of this district. I serve as the Parent Teacher Group President for one of our elementary schools and was co-chair of our pro-levy campaign in 2022; a levy we failed to pass.

Let me tell you a little bit about our district and the uniqueness of it. Talawanda School District (TSD) spends an average of \$13,941 per pupil (in 2020 the avg in Ohio was \$13,805). The state's present portion is \$2,500 per student. Local taxes constitute 67% of our public education revenue at Talawanda. About 31% of our district's students qualify for free or reduced lunch participation.

Talawanda's state share of funding is 15.8% of our total budget. Comparison state share data for school districts surrounding TSD in southwest Ohio: Hamilton City Schools —73.24%, Edgewood — 55.32%, Madison — 55.81%, Monroe —48.72%, Cincinnati Public —40.72%, Ross — 38.69%, Lakota — 21.02%.

As you know, state share of funding is measured by property value and resident income; both make TSD *appear* to be a wealthy district because of Miami University and the surrounding agricultural land (TSD is 144 square miles in size). However, Miami does not pay property taxes and CAUV provides tax relief to those farmers. My research has shown that, in addition to TSD, only 3-4 other districts in Ohio might fall into this unusual financial situation out of over 600 districts in the state.

Every school district in Ohio needs the Ohio Senate and House to fully implement the Fair School Funding Plan. Ohio children are deserving of a world-class public education and should not have to "share" this funding with a voucher expansion program – this will only siphon money away from kids, families, and communities who need it most – like Talawanda's students. Strong communities and economies are built on robust K-12 public education, and voucher expansion weakens public schools, our communities, and our state.

Additionally, special provision needs to be made to ensure that Talawanda school district and the 3-4 other districts that share our unusual combination of circumstances do not slip through the cracks and become insolvent. Our community is the support system for one of the gems in Ohio Public Higher Education, Miami University. Miami attracts students from across the country and puts Ohio on the map as a site of innovation. Miami's position is precarious, however, because it is situated in a rural area with few amenities to attract the innovators of tomorrow. To this point, one of the few reasons faculty choose to come to Miami is high-quality local schools, and the family-friendliness of the town. The cuts required by the unusual funding circumstances of our district threaten to have wide-reaching consequences for Miami University, and for Ohio. We are already witnessing the departure of some of our faculty and staff as their children's Gifted education programs are cut, as the district can no longer afford quality curriculum upgrades, and as schedules become increasingly unmanageable for working families.

The erosion of TSD's quality will certainly erode the Oxford community, and by extension, the quality and student experience of Miami University. The erosion of Miami University will leave Ohio down one more tool as it attempts to compete in a competitive, 21st century economy.

Our school district is essentially being punished for our community's two-centuries of service to Miami University, and to the State of Ohio. It is our belief that there should be a standardized per-pupil reimbursement cost in Ohio, one that is set close to the true cost of a high-quality education - a price tag that has already been determined by those who want to expand the voucher program. The current (precarious) \$2,500 we receive from the State of Ohio guarantees the demise of our community. If the situation were to worsen through the expansion of vouchers, the passage of a flat-rate income tax for upper tax brackets, through additional unfunded state mandates, our community will simply unravel that much faster.

Thank you for your consideration.