



**Senate Finance Committee
HB 33 Written Testimony**

**Springfield City School District, Clark County
Robert F. Hill, Ed.D., Chief Executive Officer & Superintendent**

May 31, 2023

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony on House Bill (HB) 33.

My name is Robert Hill and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer and Superintendent for the Springfield City School District in Clark County. In my twenty-six years in education, I have also served as a high school social studies teacher, coach, assistant high school principal, and high school principal.

The Springfield City School District is in Springfield, considered a legacy city and currently the 12th largest city in Ohio. The district, which is the 32nd largest in the state, serves approximately 7,300 students across sixteen buildings and is the most diverse and welcoming school district in Clark County with a racial overview including student sub-groups of approximately 46% White, 27% Black, 15% Multiracial, 11% Hispanic, and 1% Asian or Pacific Islander.

The district is part of the Federal Community Eligibility Program and considered to be 100% economically disadvantaged, which allows us to provide no-cost breakfast and lunch to ALL students. Approximately 70% of our students are Medicaid eligible. In addition, the district offers free preschool to ALL students and typically serves over 500 students each school year, which is necessary due to our extreme levels of poverty, to ensure that our students begin school on somewhat equal footing. Unfortunately, our early learning program is not fully-funded by the state, so every dollar of funding that we receive has an impact.

Due to the adverse societal conditions that exist in our city, our students struggle to meet performance standards and on average approximately 15% test as kindergarten ready. However, our team has created multiple systems to support the well-being of our students and staff, as well as foster the appropriate academic environment and culture that will lead to our mission of student growth and success.

In supporting this mission and during my eight-year tenure in Springfield, our residents have dependably passed three levy renewals, converting one 10.61 mil emergency operating levy to a continuous substitute levy. It is important to note that February 2006 is the last new operating tax levy passed in the district. Due to low property valuations associated with a legacy city, one-mil in Springfield only raises \$78.00 per student, as compared to

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neighboring districts of similar size raising well over \$250.00 per pupil. This number places us as approximately the 601st lowest of the 606 school districts in Ohio.

In a community that relies on the support of the state to provide 72% of our funding to serve a diverse and impoverished population, the Fair School Funding Plan is a bipartisan solution to school funding that draws upon the expertise of practitioners, as well as other invested parties from within the field of education and our communities. The formula provides the necessary inputs to meet the needs of urban students who have been overlooked since and well-before the *DeRolph* litigation.

With the current phase-in, Springfield is receiving 1/3 of the state's share of the base cost for our students. That means that the local taxpayers are expected to pay the remainder of the state share, which is problematic in a legacy city that receives 72% of our funding from the state due to extreme levels of poverty and desperately low property values. To illustrate this point, consider that our property value rose by 25% this past year, which resulted in a minimal increase of \$500,000 to a \$150 million budget.

Of note and adding to the needs of our student population, the district is experiencing a significant increase in the number of English Learners and our enrollment has surpassed 600 students (approaching 9% of our total student population), growing on an almost constant basis. In addition, the district serves over 300 homeless students, a number that also continues to grow. Both populations have high needs and require multiple costly special services.

The provisions of HB33 work favorably for our district and for students who function in the trials and tribulations associated with a high-poverty urban environment. The Springfield City School District supports the Fair School Funding Plan **and the use of data from FY22 to calculate a district's aggregate base costs** because it clearly outlines an approach for funding the cost of educating Ohio's children and the formula provides the consistency and predictability necessary to support our systems that lead to improved student outcomes. In our district this means that we can continue to address the challenges related to the pandemic that still impact school performance as outlined in the Ohio Department of Education Data Insights on the 2021-2022 School Year.

In addition, it is important to note that additional levels of funding associated with the Fair School Funding Plan will help support the systems that the district created to address staff attendance, teacher turnover and student attendance, which impact student performance in not only Springfield, but all urban districts across the nation.

Further, the additional funds will support our systems to improve student executive function skills, defined as the attention-regulation skills that make it possible to sustain attention, keep goals and information in mind, refrain from responding immediately, resist distraction, tolerate frustration, consider the consequences of different behaviors, reflect on past experiences, and plan. A student's ability to demonstrate high levels of executive function significantly impacts academic performance and the lingering effects of school closures during the pandemic have negatively impacted students' ability to demonstrate executive functioning skills across the nation by taking away the opportunity to apply these skills daily in a structured setting with clear and consistent expectations.

Finally, I am aware of questions surrounding the cash balances of school districts. It is important to note that multiple reasons exist for cash reserves in school districts, just as they exist in businesses and in the state's rainy-day fund. In Springfield, the two main reasons are:

- Unpredictability of the school-funding formula

Because of the inability to raise adequate local funds due to extremely low property valuations, the Springfield City School District must be conservative in its spending and focus on building cash reserves, which is only reinforced by the unpredictability of Ohio's funding formula. Uncertainty around state funding during each budget cycle results in the necessity to build cash reserves to help ensure the continuation of educational programming for students.

- Cash Reserve Policies

The 2008 financial crisis highlighted the importance of managing disruptions, resulting in more conservative spending by school districts. As a result, districts created cash reserve policies following best practices outlined by the Government Finance Officers Association, Moody's Investors Service, Standard & Poor's and others. The Springfield City School District is required by policy to keep 60 true cash days on hand. As of the May 2023 five-year forecast, the district will likely drop below the 60-day requirement at the end of the forecast cycle. This is extremely problematic from a local support perspective because as referenced previously, one-mil only generates \$78 per pupil.

As the leader of the Springfield City School District, I would be remiss if I did not note the tireless efforts of our dedicated, high-quality professional staff. The efforts of our certified and classified teams to meet the basic needs of our students who have experienced multiple traumas throughout their lives and who are subject to extreme poverty and daily violence, are nothing short of amazing. Without full funding, our ability to serve students who often start school many years behind grade-level is hindered. The cycle of poverty must be broken through public education and I implore the legislature to provide our students with the opportunities and skills to not only revitalize our city, but to help solve the societal ills and job shortages across this great state and nation.

Chair Dolan and members of the committee, thank you for taking the time to read my written testimony. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have and can be reached at hill@scsdoh.org or 937.505.2806.



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