

**Senate Finance Committee
HB 33 Testimony**

**Willoughby-Eastlake City Schools, Lake County
Jaime Shatsman, Vice President - Board of Education**

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 testimony today on House Bill (HB) 33.

My name is Jaime Shatsman and I am a member of the Willoughby-Eastlake Board of Education in Lake County where I serve as the Vice President and Legislative Liaison. Today, I appear before you as a parent and a taxpayer and the views reflected in my testimony represent my personal thoughts and experiences.

I have an 8 year old daughter who is currently enrolled in public school. Clara attended Thomas Jefferson Elementary School in Eastlake for both first and second grade. Clara is what some folks may call “twice exceptional” due to her gifted identification and ADHD diagnosis. She receives gifted interventions and has a written 504 plan from our school district. These services, along with her amazing teachers, have helped her to excel these past two years. Clara loves school, devours chapter-books daily, and approaches problems with curiosity and creative solutions. The academic and social growth Clara has displayed during her time in the Willoughby-Eastlake school district, have exceeded all of my expectations. My gratitude for this wonderful experience is what inspired me to serve as a member of our school board and has turned me into a passionate advocate for public education.

Despite her intellectual abilities, my daughter did not always thrive in the classroom. She attended an area private school for Kindergarten where tuition exceeded \$13,000 a year. We were attracted to the school because their marketing materials and admissions staff told a story of personalized education, academic rigor, and a wonderful community on a beautiful campus. My husband and I wanted the best for our daughter and we were fortunate to have the resources to afford to send her. Unfortunately, Clara was bored in her classroom every day and we saw little evidence of growth even after having multiple conversations with her teachers and school administrators about our concerns. Being a private school, they were not required to offer gifted interventions and had few resources to accommodate students that were performing above grade level. Although we did love the school community and liked the staff on a personal level, we began to explore other options, including public school. I’m so thankful that we did.

I tell you this story, not to criticize this private institution, but to point out the importance of public education. Public schools provide *all* students with an education, regardless of their abilities, challenges, socioeconomic status, race, religion, or other identifications. That’s important and likely why our predecessors established education as a public good. All children deserve a high

quality education. From listening to many, many hours of committee meetings on the budget these past few months, I think our entire legislature agrees with me on that.

The Fair School Funding Plan is a school funding model that prioritizes meeting the needs of each and every child so that they can reach their full potential. It balances state funding against a community's ability to fund their schools through local taxes.

The "fairness" of such a plan relies on two things. First, it relies on evaluating the actual cost to educate all students. That's why keeping the updated FY 2022 base costs inputs included in the House-passed version of this bill is so important. And, it's why I am advocating that these calculations reflect the most current data available each year rather than a one time adjustment. Also, it relies on asking communities that can afford to pay more to pay more for their public schools. These things seem fair to me and I ask this committee to consider taking the house passed bill a step farther to guarantee full funding of the formula and updating inputs on a yearly basis.

Respectfully, I'd also like to tell you what doesn't seem fair to me. It doesn't seem fair that my daughter's school receives less than \$2000 per year from the state to educate her when the current version of HB 33 would give a nonpublic school over \$5000 to educate her, assuming our household income is below 450% of the poverty threshold. And, to that point, I have heard testimony advocating for removing the income threshold entirely. It doesn't seem consistent to me that communities are expected to invest more in their public schools based on their ability to pay but families aren't expected to invest more in nonpublic schools based on their ability to pay. Finally, it doesn't seem fair to me that public schools are held responsible for transporting students who choose nonpublic schools. In my district, the estimated costs for transportation of nonpublic students for FY 23 are \$671, 953 which includes the cost to transport and payment in lieu of transportation of over \$500 per student. When my daughter attended private school, they offered us a \$1500 door to door bussing service and advised us to contact our public school district to get the payment in lieu of transportation to help offset these costs.

I'd also like to note that as a parent, I have access to detailed financial reports and consistent academic performance data for all public schools in Ohio. If non-public schools receive public funding, I hope they would also be required to publicly provide the same detailed reporting. This information could help all families make the best decisions for their children.

Again, I don't begrudge any parent choice in educating their child. I am advocating for fairness for all children. I ask this committee to work towards ensuring public schools have adequate funding to serve all students, applying consistent standards to all schools receiving public dollars, and reconsidering the transportation burden on public schools as you evaluate this bill.

Chair Dolan and members of the committee, thank you for investing the time in listening to my testimony and the testimony of all those who appear before you today. I truly appreciate you letting me tell my family's story and I hope I have given you additional perspective on what a wonderful option public education is for so many children, like my daughter. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.