

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Ellen Price and I'm a resident of Oxford in southwestern Ohio. I'm here today to talk about the Talawanda school district which includes Oxford and surrounding areas. The impact of decreased state funding and resulting budget shortfalls after a recent tax levy failure has been very damaging for our public school. My connection to Talwanda is as a concerned community member and parent, my daughter attended Talawanda schools from kindergarten through high school. I'm also involved with my local League of Women Voters which has closely followed this issue, although I'm speaking today as a private citizen. When my daughter was at Talwanda, we were impressed with the high quality of teaching she received and the school district has been and continues to be very successful by metrics such as standardized tests, graduation rates, students continuing with two- and four- year colleges as well as vocational programs.

A tax levy to cover increased operating expenses for Talwanda was on the November ballot, with 18 years since the last operating levy. When the levy failed to pass, the school district had to make up a \$5.4 million dollar shortfall over four years. Some background about our situation; Talawanda schools only receive about 15% of their budget from the state, that is just \$2,500 per child. By the state's formula our district is judged to be comparatively wealthy, that is, that we are able to make up the rest through levies and taxes. But what happens when the taxpayers have had enough and just do not support the school levy?

The school administration and school board have had to make some very difficult decisions in cutting the budget. With community input, they devised a three-year plan with increasing cuts each succeeding year. Reductions in the coming years include eliminating staff, teachers, administrators, counselors and school resource officers, eliminating STEM programs, gifted programs, elective classes, music and art. And starting this fall, students will pay a steep fee to participate in sports; \$900.00 for high school and \$350.00 for middle school, that is per year, per child, per sport. I can't go into all the reductions in detail, but for example, this fall, bus service has been eliminated for high school students and students within a two mile radius. The Talawanda School District is 144 square miles, with one high school.

All students in the district will be affected by the failed levy in different ways, but I keep coming back to the rural students with no bus service. How are they going to get to school? What about parents who need to be at work? Or single parents? What if they don't have a reliable vehicle? Did I mention that 30% of our students, many of them from rural areas, are from families with incomes below the poverty line? The high school years are such an important launching pad for future success, the thought of students simply unable to get to school is devastating.

The Talwanda situation is complex, the presence of Miami University both inflates the apparent wealth of our district and means that there is a lot of un-taxable land within Oxford. But I wanted to give you a snapshot of what our community is going through since the levy failure. And we are not alone, in the May election, school levies failed to pass in nearby Ross and Edgewood school districts. As you consider the upcoming two-year budget, my specific ask for the legislature to calculate school expenses based on the budget numbers from 2022 instead of the figures from 2018, to at least factor in the cost of inflation when considering the financial costs of running a school district. Please, our public schools need more, not less support. The present system is hurting our Ohio students and families.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you, I appreciate your time and attention.