

Proponent Testimony for HB33, Section 3318.33
Senate Finance Committee
5/31/2023

Superintendent Nick Dettwiller, Eastern Meigs Local School District
Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Cirino, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Nick Dettwiller, I am the Superintendent of Eastern Local School District in Meigs County. I am here today to provide insight to Section 3318.33 of HB33, the Accelerated Appalachian School Building Assistance Program.

When discussing the state of school facilities in Ohio, most believe the DeRolph case and creation of the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission solved this issue once and for all. Unfortunately, I am here today to tell you that has not yet been the case.

Eastern Local serves about 700 students in Meigs County in SouthEast Ohio. Anyone really lost, we are about 30 minutes south of Athens, and Ohio University or more people know the hometown of Bengals Quarterback Joe Burrow. Joe's mom is actually our Elementary Principal.

We currently have a 70 year old Junior Senior High School and a 25 year old Preschool-6th grade building that houses a full time health clinic open to the public with healthcare and dental, multiple mental health counselors. We also have a public library in our facility, and we have recently added multiple career tech options for our students, and over 65% of our students take CCP classes. We also provide dozens of extracurricular options for our students and our students are incredibly successful in academics and extracurriculars as you will hear from Rylee here shortly. We truly are the center of the community.

Our buildings have severe maintenance costs with old leaky roofs, aging HVAC that need replaced, and many of the other upgrades needed with aging buildings. As we have worked with the OFCC to build our master plan and begin the Expedited local partnership process, and we have all available ESSER funds to put a new roof on one of our buildings and install an outside air chiller, but we have many more issues and we have also found out that even with an OFCC project we would need to pay for a close to 2 million dollar project to fix a sinking floor in our elementary gym before we could start the OFCC portion and our local share. A one Mill levy in our district produces around 100,000 dollars. So when we go to our families for our local share of the project it is a big ask. Especially in an aging community where a large portion of our population are retirees on a fixed income. As a district we have worked hard to take care of our facilities over the years and we are proud of what we have, but we want our kids to have some of the same opportunities as other students across the state.

This is the reality for not only our district, but for 38+ other school districts within the Appalachian Ohio region who have deferred, lapsed, or not yet been offered funding through the

OFCC. These are hard working families and communities, with a lot of pride, but the realities of the economics of the region make passing levies very difficult and very taxing on our people.

In the year 2000, the legislature enacted the Accelerated Urban School Building Assistance Program, which targeted funding for new facilities in the six largest urban districts in Ohio. Over the past 23 years, this program has built over 250 new school buildings in these six urban districts. The Urban Accelerated Program has taught us that targeted aid for high-need school districts *works*. The Appalachian Accelerated Program would provide the same, long overdue aid for our districts. The funds appropriated by the Ohio House in this budget would allow our districts to receive offers from the OFCC more quickly, separating us geographically into our own program. It includes a levy incentive program to ensure our communities can take advantage of the facilities funds being offered to them, and catapult our districts into learning spaces designed for the 21st century – just as the previous legislation did for urban districts. This would be huge for the students of this region.

I ask you to protect the investment made by the Ohio House in the Section 3318.33 of HB33, as these dollars for new school buildings means opportunities for our students. I want our students to wake up each morning and attend school in a building that gives them the best opportunity for academic success: where they can learn in a safe, temperature controlled environment with modern amenities; without leaks and cracks and sinking floors. I have no doubt our kids will work hard and find success either way, but just like every parent wants their child to have the best opportunity for success we want to give those opportunities to our students.

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Rylee Barrett , Student, Eastern Meigs Local School District
Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Cirino, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Rylee Barrett, I am a Junior student at Eastern Local School District in Meigs County. I am here today to further explain the need for the Accelerated Appalachian School Building Assistance Program.

Imagine you walk into your Biology classroom only to see multiple floor-to-ceiling cracks in the block wall. Imagine sitting in the bleachers in the 80 degree gymnasium during a volleyball game and being able to see outside through cracks in the foundation. Imagine sitting in your English classroom only to be startled by what you thought was thunder but ended up being the boiler exploding and eventually covered from head-to-toe in black soot. Imagine going to a school where the bathrooms don't even work because the plumbing is too old. That is what it is like to be an Eastern student.

For the first time in about ten years, Eastern reopened the shop classroom. For the first time in roughly twenty-five years, Eastern reopened the agriculture sciences classroom. I signed up for this and I was extremely excited, but that excitement completely dwindled when I walked into my classroom on the first day only to be greeted by thirty empty desks with chromebooks. Not a single piece of equipment was there for us to learn. What did we do, you ask, to learn about welding, carpentry, and agriculture? We did lessons on Google classroom and I, along with all of my peers, hated EVERY. SINGLE. SECOND. When we asked our vo-ag teacher why we didn't have any equipment to learn hands-on in the classroom we were told that it was because our school didn't have the money to afford the tools and the equipment. Our district had to fundraise like crazy to a community that is already hit multiple times by every other group in our school. Eventually we were able to purchase basic tools for class through our own hard work.

Besides vo-ag, I've never taken a single science class with a laboratory component because our lab doesn't function correctly. The exhaust hood doesn't even work, and none of the classrooms have both an eye-wash or emergency shower station. As you can imagine, this impacts our Science Olympiad team where I am captain. It's really heartbreaking to think that my Science Olympiad teacher had to purchase the lumber, adhesives, fishing line, and screws for our building projects to compete at the State level competition.

Again, to compete in the Model United Nations, we are at a disadvantage. Because of a lack of funds. We are funded, again, by team member fundraising. Just last week, I spent two full days washing cars to raise money for us to compete at the State level Model United Nations.

Yet, when I go to other schools to compete in academic and athletic competitions, I am in awe. For example, a couple months ago when I was able to attend a football camp at South Westerville High school, I was blown away by the facilities this school district had. Inside and out this building looked brand new. The resources and access to upgrades they have is incomparable to ours. The trip to Westerville showed me the disparity between the resources available to their school and ours, and how important this program would be for our school and many others like it.

With all of the inequitable funding, why is my school so successful? Nearly every year, we have sent an athlete to the state track meet and we only have a blacktop track without a single line marker on it. In 2014, our high school girls' basketball team was crowned the Division 4 State Champions and we only have one gymnasium for high school athletics. For the past five years, we have made it to the Playoffs in football. In Model UN, we consistently make it to the general assembly in attempts to pass our resolution. This year in the Science Olympiad, we attended the state competition and I was grateful to place 19th out of forty other schools. We recently sent six sophomores to work with Dr. Keith Bell in the Ohio State University Student Leadership Research Collaborative. We graduate students that earn full scholarships to multiple Universities throughout the state and beyond. We also have wildly successful alumni.

I realize that if this bill passes, I won't get to enjoy the things that I wish I could. But, like Thomas Paine argued when he suggested we fight now so the future can enjoy peace, I am here asking you to pass this bill so my younger friends and hopefully future children can enjoy the same equitable education as other students in Ohio.

In the beginning, I asked you to imagine going to my school. In the end, I want to leave you with this — Imagine what we could accomplish with the implementation of the Accelerated Appalachian School Building Assistance Program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.