

**Senate Finance Committee
HB 33 Testimony**

**Newton Falls Exempted Village School District
Trumbull County
Terry Armstrong, Treasurer
Newton Falls Exempted Village School District
May 31, 2021**

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 Terry Armstrong and I serve as the Treasurer for the Newton Falls Exempted Village School District in Trumbull County. We are in the heart of the Mahoning Valley that has experienced many economic challenges. Our economically disadvantaged percentage is over 50% and our median adjusted gross income is \$31,655.00, well below the state average. Despite these challenges our community continues to push forward and show pride in our students that continue to achieve great accomplishments.

We are a district of 900 students and much like other districts in the Mahoning Valley we have experienced declining population thus declining enrollment. We have consolidated buildings, have the 2nd lowest property tax millage in our county out of twenty districts and in the last two years we have reduced staff through reduction in force. We are doing what we need to do as a district to assure that financially we can continue to provide resources for our staff to continue to provide our students a quality education.

We ask that the Senate support the continued implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan to help districts throughout Ohio. 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. This formula is about each child and meeting their needs.

The Fair School Funding Plan provides an objective, rational, and transparent solution to school funding. However, for the formula to work, it needs to be fully implemented. We are 1/3 of the way there and I am here today to ask on behalf of our students, our district and school community I serve that you move forward with the next steps toward fully implementing the formula enacted in the last biennial budget.

We need the predictability this formula provides. We ask that you keep the updated FY 2022 base cost inputs included in the House-passed version of the bill. Funding in Ohio has been consistently inconsistent. This unpredictability often unduly shifts the burden of funding our schools to the local taxpayer. With the current phase-in, my district is receiving 1/3 of the state's share of the base cost for my district's students. That means that the local taxpayers are expected to pay the remainder of the state share. By continuing the phase-in of the formula with updated base cost inputs, schools in Ohio will have the much-needed stability and predictability to provide more accurate and realistic five-year

forecasts and giving the ability to implement educational programming for our students based on this accurate long-term plan. In Newton Falls this will result in our district forecast moving from carryover balances from \$2.7 million to \$3 million in FY 24 and \$2.4 million to nearly \$3.5 million in FY25.

Without the implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan with updated cost components our district will be at risk of continued cuts and we do not want our students negatively impacted. This current fiscal year we are spending over \$300,000 less in overall general fund expenses than last year. Like many districts in Ohio our district and its taxpayers need help continuing to meet the needs of our students.

Existing and planned programs in Newton Falls that the full implementation will help us meet student's needs include:

- A robust Career Based Intervention Program as part of our Workforce Readiness initiative
- Student Wellness and Success programs that include mental health supports through Social Work and School Counseling services
- Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid, or DPIA, that targets student supports that students in need services such as social-emotional programs, learning loss as well as other struggles experienced by students with barriers to learning.
- A district-wide STEM program that will engage and prepare students for emerging opportunities.

These are just a few examples.

While the one-time influx of ESSER dollars were a big help to meeting needs you can see from our carryover balance and five-year forecasts that our school community is in need of the help that full implementation with updated cost components of the Fair School Funding Plan will provide our students!

As a Treasurer and having served as a Superintendent for six years I also appreciate the predictability that the Fair School Funding plan provides districts. In past funding programs school finance in Ohio was unpredictable which created a great deal of instability as you could imagine.

We remain appreciative that two years ago, in an overwhelming bi-partisan approach, the legislature supported implementing the Fair School Funding program. I am a former Government Teacher that understands the historical nature of what you did. I stand here today as a Treasurer but also as that former government teacher that tried to instill in my students the theme of democracy is a verb.

Chair Dolan and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today and I hope you continue to move forward with the Fair School Funding Plan and make history. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

