

**Testimony in Support of Certain Provisions of the Fair School Funding Plan Contained in  
HB 33**

**To**

**The Senate Finance Committee**

**From**

**Terry Groden, Board Member, North Olmsted City Schools**

**May 31, 2023**

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, I am writing to express our district's support for the continued phase in of the Fair School Funding Plan under HB 33.

My name is Terry Groden and I am a board member for the North Olmsted City Schools. North Olmsted is a western suburb of Cuyahoga County. We are a community that has been dedicated to providing quality education for its children. Evidence of that commitment will become apparent later in this testimony. However, the North Olmsted community is finding itself increasingly challenged to afford such an education.

That is why the North Olmsted City Schools advocated for the initial implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan as part of HB 110 in 2021. As you know, the Fair School Funding Plan takes into account the community's ability to pay, in addition to local property taxes, when determining the state and local share for funding public education.

This is important for North Olmsted, a community where approximately 4 in 10 households are considered economically disadvantaged, and where we are dedicated to securing a successful future for a high number of students that are costly to educate. We currently have approximately 600 students on an IEP, teach English in a district where at least 21 different languages are spoken, and spend millions annually to educate special needs students (which has become ever more challenging since the state began cutting reimbursements to districts for Catastrophic Special Needs cases).

The Fair School Funding Plan also provides funding that is transparent and predictable. However, the formula will lose its effectiveness if the next phase-in does not include the FY 2022 base cost inputs approved by the House. In North Olmsted, using FY 2022 inputs translates to an increase of approximately three quarters of a million dollars each year beginning in 2024. We believe such an increase *now* is a manageable amount. However, adequate investments in the formula will become unwieldy if the state waits any longer to update the base costs.

Last November, North Olmsted passed a combination bond and operating levy to construct a new pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup>-grade elementary building and secure funds needed to maintain current programming. The community stepped in to help preserve the quality education it has come to expect while it, like others, have grappled with millions of dollars lost due to the phase-out of the

tangible personal property tax, the transfer or reallocation of funds to educate students at non-district schools, and state cuts to offset transportation expenses, including for those non-district students.

However, by the third year of our current 5-Year Forecast, we are already deficit spending. This is despite the fact that, before passage of the November levy, the North Olmsted City Schools permanently cut approximately three million dollars in expenses. The district also demonstrated sound fiscal stewardship with the ESSER dollars it received. It leveraged those funds to provide, among other things: a) each student with the necessary technology for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, b) each building with enhanced safety and security features, and c) summer instruction to help offset learning loss experienced during the pandemic.

Wise use of those ESSER dollars helped the district seek a lower, more reasonable millage amount on our operating issue and preserve fundamental programs and services that are vital to the families we serve. We did not use relief funds from the federal government to launch initiatives that would disappear once that money was gone. Our district values stability and predictability.

Therefore, we respectfully ask that you keep the updated FY 2022 base cost inputs included in the House-passed version of HB 33. Implementing the next phase of the Fair School Funding Plan with FY 2022 base cost inputs will help provide the stability and predictability that we treasure as we endeavor to provide the quality education the children of North Olmsted, and all across the state of Ohio, so rightly deserve.

Thank you for reading our testimony and for your consideration.