

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 33
Senate
Finance Committee
June 8, 2023

Tony Rett

Chair Matt Dolan, Vice Chair Jerry Cirino, Ranking Member Vernon Sykes, and members of the Finance committee of the Ohio Senate:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Tony Rett. I am a parent of a child in the Barberton City School District, an educator in the same district, husband to an educator in the Mogadore School District, a PTA member, and an advocate for all children. I am in support of fully funding the Fair School Funding plan outlined in HB33.

My daughter will begin 9th grade at Barberton High School this fall. She has two parents at home, both of whom are educators, both of whom care very deeply for and value education, both of whom are committed to her and her future. We live in a decent school district. We are able to pass levies when we need it, and our schools provide adequate (though not exceptional) programs and services. She has a better shot than most.

Unfortunately, that is not true for a large and growing subset of children in Ohio. Our public schools are supposed to provide access to quality education for *all* children, regardless of background or ability. Our General Assembly is supposed to provide a “thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state.” Yet, we know that the strongest determinants of student academic achievement in Ohio are geography and genealogy. Where one lives and who one’s parents are more reliably predict one’s education and employment outcomes than intelligence, access to technology, or grit. This situation is exacerbated by our public schools’ overwhelming reliance on local funding in the form of property tax levies. The wealth of one’s neighborhood overwhelmingly determines the funding of one’s schools, and consequently the programs and services offered. The only remedies available to families not fortunate enough to live in a wealthy neighborhood are to move to a different, better funded district, or to find the means to enroll in a private school. Neither of these solutions help our existing schools, and both require students to have parents who have the means and motivation to work around a broken public school system, something which is not available to most children in Ohio.

We have a saying often used where I teach: “Parents send us the best children they have, and we have a duty to educate them all.” That saying has a corollary: “Our students bring with them the best parents they have, and we have a duty to work with them all.” At my

school, at my wife's school, we work with and for every child in our classrooms because they showed up with the best they have, and it's not their fault that we don't have the tools or funding to take care of them properly. It is not the fault of the children of the State of Ohio that they have parents or guardians who lack the means or motivation to sidestep a broken system of public education. It is not the responsibility of the children of the State of Ohio to convince their neighbors to accept another tax levy so they can have running water in their school bathroom or current textbooks or teachers who are properly compensated for the education they have earned and the work they do. It is the children of the State of Ohio who suffer from all of this, though.

Our public schools exist to serve our children, not their parents, nor their teachers, nor their administrators, nor their legislators. It is our responsibility to ensure that those schools are funded fully, fairly, equitably, and immediately. This means not just funding the Fair School Funding plan outlined in HB33 fully, immediately, and permanently, but providing for its oversight and revision by commissioning a study to determine the true cost of educating a child in Ohio, taking into account the cost of developing an educator workforce of qualified teachers, ensuring transportation and busing, kindergarten preparedness, and addressing declining math and reading scores as well as chronic absenteeism. Public education in Ohio didn't get this way overnight, but with this budget we can take a strong step toward building a generation of Ohioans we can be proud of.

Thank you for your time and consideration.