

November 13, 2023

Ohio Senate
Senate Transportation Committee
Ohio Statehouse
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Re: Dublin City Schools Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 163

To the Honorable Senator Kunze and members of the Ohio Senate Transportation Committee, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this initiative that we have worked on. We're truly grateful for the opportunity to share with you the work we have put into this project and our aspirations for our community.

We are all students of Dublin Jerome High School, and though we're fortunate enough to live in such a wonderful community, we can still see the need of our community members that goes unrecognized.

When Mr. Bookmyer shared with our AP Government class that Mrs. Venne, our district's Director of Community Engagement, was interested in working with his students to create a specialty license plate, we were eager to volunteer. In AP Government, we learned to appreciate the structures of our democracy and the value of civic engagement, and this opportunity has given us real experience in our legislative process and, more importantly, in serving our community.

We all decided that we wanted proceeds from license plate sales to benefit the Dublin Food Pantry. Although many people fail to see impoverished families in an affluent area like Dublin, 4,700 households in Dublin live on less than \$35,000 a year. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity in our community, and since 2019 the Dublin Food Pantry has seen a 303% increase in need. All told, this has led to the pantry serving 32,000 individuals last year, and this number is not stagnating. After opening a new building last year and still needing funds for daily operations, the pantry needs to raise almost a million dollars. Our project will not only be a way for Dublin citizens to showcase their pride for our community, it will also allow us to give back to our community and support its members that are struggling the most.

It's not only Dublin citizens that the Dublin Food Pantry provides essential assistance to. When the Hilliard Food Pantry burnt down in July, the Dublin Food Pantry helped serve Hilliard families whose source of food was displaced.

Although we felt compelled to volunteer for this project for the same reasons, we also had distinct, personal experiences that motivated us to help the Dublin Food Pantry.

In the past, we have helped the pantry by cooking food for these families in need, but we always wanted to do more to support my community. This initiative was a great opportunity for us to give back to the city that raised us while getting involved in government.

When I first moved to Ohio 3 years ago, I was looking for an opportunity to learn more about my new community, which led me to volunteer at the Mid-Ohio Food Bank. This invaluable experience helped me witness the hidden windows of low-income, marginalized communities in what was often the wealthy bubble of Dublin and Columbus. It was because of this eye-opening experience that I knew we needed to create a metaphorical bridge between low-resource communities, and this opportunity allowed us to put this empathy into action.

We believe that a specialty license plate would help instill enduring pride for our community, for the community that raised us and is now giving us the opportunity to give back. And we, as engaged citizens of the next generation, ask for your support to pass the Senate Bill 163, and would like to thank Senators Kunze and Brenner for their amazing support.

Thank you all for taking the time to hear our story; thank you for helping us contribute to our community and participate in our government by passing this bill.

Maria Rivera-Alvarez, Sal LoParo, Oli Wood, and Srijan Puli
Dublin City Schools Students