

House Bill 96
Interested Party Testimony
Jermaine Ferguson, School Board Member
Marysville Exempted Village School District
House Education Committee

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill (HB) 96, the biennial budget.

My name is Jermaine Ferguson. I am the legislative liaison for the Marysville Exempted Village School District Board of Education in Union County.

Marysville Schools serve 5,656 students in grades pre-12 through 12, and our student enrollment is projected to grow on average by 100 students per year. In 2028, we are projected to have our largest kindergarten class of 525 students, not based on the rising number of new housing permits alone but on a high and positive birth rate from 2023. Marysville is a growing and thriving community, but we are experiencing much turbulence.

In May 2023, our voters rejected a new money levy request of 8.4 mills that would address the deficit in our operating fund and position us to be prepared for growth. As an exempted village school district, we comprise the City of Marysville and portions of seven township communities. Under normal economic conditions, there is a natural split in our voter demographics concerning any property tax issue; however, with the 2022 triennial update to be collected in 2023, we experienced an overall value increase of 23.86% for Class I and II property. We experienced a firm rejection by the voters primarily due to the timing of new property tax bills and the amount of our levy ask.

Fortunately, Governor DeWine and the 135th General Assembly adopted a state operating budget that continued the phase-in of the fair school funding formula and updated the inputs from using the 2018 to 2022 base cost. While it was a massive win for all districts in Ohio, it was also a lifesaver for our district as we received an additional \$3.4 million from the state. How did we respond? We delayed our levy request by one year and lowered our ask from 8.4 to 5.5 mills. In November 2024, our levy request was defeated by a minimal margin, and there is still a strong sentiment against any new property tax. Yet, because the cost inputs were updated, we were able to lower our request to our voters significantly, and we hope to be successful in this upcoming election.

I am here today to ask, on behalf of my students, my district, and the community I serve, to request that the House continue the formula's phase-in with updated base cost inputs. For my district, this will provide our taxpayers with additional relief and give our board of education a better chance to restore and prevent further degradation of the quality of education and the number of opportunities we should provide to all students.

Marysville is a special place, and we have greatly benefitted from over a decade of the firm and steady leadership from our superintendent, treasurer, and board of education. Marysville has the 19th lowest revenue per pupil, \$4,783 below the state average. 83% of Ohio schools have a higher expenditure per pupil than Marysville Schools, and we are the second lowest among all central Ohio school districts. Marysville has the 5th highest student-to-teacher ratio in the state, and if we are not successful in May, with the next phase of our contingency plan, we will become the highest in Ohio. Despite our recent years of turbulence, we rank in the top 17% of all schools in Ohio in the performance index. Our educators continue to serve, equip, and prepare our students for their future.

But our students, educators, and taxpayers desperately need fuel in our tanks - not headwinds. Under the current budget proposal, Marysville Schools would see a reduction of \$225,890 for FY26 and an additional \$188,890 for FY27. In total, we would see a decrease of \$414,780 in state funding. These numbers may seem inconsequential compared to an annual operating budget of \$68 million. However, let me remind you that our student enrollment is growing by an average of 100 students per year in my District. Still, our staffing levels and opportunities for our students have declined. Under the proposed budget, the estimated state share percentage will decrease from 38.3% to 30.5%. Instead of receiving additional state revenue to help put fuel in our tanks, we will experience more headwinds in an already difficult time.

I served in the United States Marine Corps, and we lived out the phrase “do more with less” as the least funded branch but the most accomplished among all military service branches. I know what it is to be lean and green, and I know that Marysville Schools will deploy every dollar and cent most efficiently in our mission of serving our students.

But just like in the Marine Corps and Marysville Schools, we achieve great things because of our people...yet we must keep and continue attracting high-quality staff in this competitive labor market. Our actual costs are going up, and the cost inputs must be updated to keep the formula balanced and fair and to allow my District to keep our property taxes as low as possible without sacrificing the quality of education we provide our students.

The Fair School Funding Plan is more than just a funding formula—it represents our commitment to every Ohio student, family, and community. By fully implementing this plan, we will invest in stronger communities, a more competitive workforce, and a brighter future for Ohio. ***So as I come to a close, please amend H.B. 96 to continue the formula's phase-in with updated base cost inputs.***

Chair Fowler Arthur and members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.