

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kathryn Feltey and I am a retired professor living in Akron, Ohio. Many of the thousands of students I taught over my 40 years of teaching at three different Ohio universities were educated in the Ohio public school system. My adult son attend a public high school in Akron. I am currently working as a researcher on a federally funded project in the Canton public schools. I am writing to urge the committee to include the 3rd phase of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan in the state budget.

I understand that there is concern about the sustainability of the Funding Plan, but I think you'll find that the long-terms costs of NOT following through on the funding will be much steeper and produce negative outcomes for students and teachers living in Ohio. It is not enough for schools to simply survive as they are forced to cut away at essential service. For example, wellness programs which are critical in an era where the mental health challenges of youth, exacerbated by violence such as school shootings, are rapidly increasing. This is a time for us to ensure that the 90% of Ohio students who attend public schools are able to successfully pursue higher education or alternative career paths that will result in economic growth and social stability in Ohio's cities, towns, and rural communities.

In my observations over four decades, the staff and teachers in public schools are diligently working to educate their students and provide them with supportive and growth-enhancing environments in the classroom and beyond. However, one of the greatest challenges to schools today is retention of qualified and experienced teachers. Up to 50% of teachers leave the field of education before their fifth year, in large part due to rising demands and declining resources (Cell, et al 2023).

As an educator, I have wished over the years that those making funding decisions about education were required to spend a month teaching a class of students in resource-challenged schools. In the absence of that, I hope that you are working diligently to gather the information you need from those "in the trenches" to include administrators, staff, teachers, and students, and others who are contributing to education (maintenance workers, bus drivers, school lunchroom workers).

In closing, I want to note that political debates on how much should be spent educating children rarely have anything to do with whether "children deserve a gentle and happy childhood" as Jonathan Kozol noted (1997). If Ohio is truly "the heart of it all", let's have a heart and make our public schools rich with love, learning, hope, and well-being for all. Who knows? Maybe Ohio can become a beacon of light in these troubled times.

Thank you for considering my testimony. Please include the 3rd phase of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan in the state budget!