

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

Education Committee, Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Brenda Buchanan. I have participated in the Berea public school system as a student from 1969 to 1981, as a parent from 1998 to 2016 in the Columbia Local Schools and as a school board member for the same, from 2008 to 2015. I'm here to urge the committee to include the 3rd phase of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan in the state budget. The Great Recession shaped much of my time on the school board. I understand the frustration of struggling to make a district work when state funding has been cut. I also understand the frustration of the community when they too were struggling and we had to ask them for more money - especially when they knew that the Ohio school funding system had been declared unconstitutional over a decade before. Even though I was no longer on the school board, as a taxpayer, I was excited to see the Fair School Funding Plan pass in 2021, hoping that finally some of the burden of school funding would be taken off the shoulders of property owners, many of whom are senior citizens on a fixed income. However, the comments made by Speaker Huffman at the beginning of the year, calling for huge education budget cuts and his references to the Fair School plan as "unsustainable" worried me. People are already under the strain of large property value increases and less state funding leads to even more levies on the ballot. I was then delighted to read that the governor's plan included the 3rd phase of the plan until I realized that the base costs of the plan had not been adjusted to reflect inflation and another half billion dollars was being designated for the Ed Choice programs. Solving school funding is never an easy path, however, returning the 1.5 billion dollars in vouchers given to only some of our students without any sort of accountability requirements, seems to be a simple step in the right direction to maintain public schools for all of the students.

Providing Ohio's children with a good education is an imperative that goes as far back as the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Each township was required to provide a center lot for a public school under the guiding principle that "knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." I ask you to consider my testimony and choose to support the public schools. Please include the 3rd phase of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan in the state budget. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.