

Rebecca Surendorff
Support Third Phase of Fair School Funding Plan
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Chairman Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony on the need to fund the Third Phase of the Fair School Funding Plan. I am Rebecca Surendorff, a lifelong Ohio resident and mom of 4 school age children. I grew up in a large family that chose homeschooling and parochial schools to educate all 6 kids. I was continuing in that family tradition when in August 2019 Fr. Geoff Drew (ordained 2004) was arrested for 9 counts of child rape in Hamilton County, Ohio. Fr. Geoff Drew's most recent assignment was pastor of St. Ignatius School, the largest Catholic Elementary School in Ohio. Pastors have superintendent like authority in the schools that they run here in our state. My four children were all students at St. Ignatius in grades 8, 6, 4, and kindergarten the year Fr. Geoff Drew ran the school. Before Drew was a priest, in the mid 80's and early 90's he was the music minister, music teacher and the grade school band director at my elementary school, St. Jude. The court documents in Drew's 2019 arrest and 2021 conviction created a frightening picture of red flag grooming behavior with minors over the course of 3 decades in 3 Ohio counties. The case file is thick, but the highlights include a formal seminary complaint regarding minors, a 2005 group letter of 40+ boys at St. Rita's School in Dayton, a child protective services report from a St. Rita teacher, 2 more child protective services reports and criminal investigations in Butler County regarding his conduct with minors in 2013, 2015 and 2018. Fr. Drew was running St. Ignatius School in Hamilton County while under investigation in Butler County in 2018.

My husband and I were appalled that the parochial system had put so many children at risk. We realized there were few paths for safety and change within the parochial system. We then realized our local public school was poorly funded. In 2021 we made the difficult decision to sell our home on the street my family had lived for 6 generations. We moved to a well-funded Ohio public school district and enrolled our 4 kids in public schools. The public-school community was welcoming, and the teachers were amazing. Our children had excellent grades in their parochial schools and were in advanced courses. In the transition to public schools, we found that they were behind in science and math. We worked with their teachers to overcome the gaps from their years in parochial schools and I am pleased to report that all 4 kids are flourishing today.

The same year we left parochial schools my sister and brother-in-law decided to leave parochial education with their 4 kids as well. A well-funded public school district in Ohio was not in their housing budget. They opted to move to a well-funded district in Kentucky. The following year

my brother, his wife and 3 kids opted to transfer across the country in part because of safety concerns in parochial schools combined with unequal funding of public schools.

Nearly 90% of the children in Ohio are educated in public schools. Quality schools are a win for the entire community from small business owners to supporting innovation. All Ohio children should have access to a well-funded education in a school that has transparency for spending, safety and academic standards. If Ohio wants young families to stay, we need to give them an environment to flourish in. I implore the members of the House Education Committee to be steadfast in their support of the final phase of the Fair School Funding Plan.