

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 96
House Education Committee
2/24/25

Chair Sarah Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Mike Odiosio and members of the Education committee of the Ohio House:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Danielle Wirick and I am a parent of two young children in the Defiance City Schools system. I am testifying today to advocate for the schools in my county, two of which will see funding cuts, my own schools funding will not change from what I understand but given the increases in costs to educate that is still effectively a cut in funding. Inflation needs to be addressed in this bill by recalculating the cost to educate per child. This has been neglected in past budgets and must be rectified. I am asking you today, as a citizen of this state, to fully fund our public schools. Not doing so is a dereliction of your duties to the citizens and children of this state as previous underfunding has been found unconstitutional. Property owners in my area are not happy with the constant property tax hikes to continue to keep our schools running. It will be used as a campaign issue if this runaway legislature continues to forget that their job is to represent and that this committee's job is to help public education.

One of the first things to go when schools are underfunded are the arts and extra programs that can help children who are gifted to nurture that gift outside of the standard curriculum. I know from my days as a choir member that our program was often under threat every time there was a school levy. I lived with sadness and depression as a child. The arts were that one place I was able to express myself and to deal with my feelings. Music saved my life along with the other arts I engaged in. My children also thrive when given artistic mediums and exposure. My oldest child is at the top of his class in math and reading, loves science and is finding that there are connections between these subjects that reinforce the subject matter and make him want to learn more about them. He makes lovely cartoons and is learning to make his own video games and mods with very simple software. This is fueling an interest in coding which I also try to find ways to encourage at home.

The wisps of these extras exist in some of our schools but they won't continue to exist without better funding. Rather than giving wisps for our children to grasp at, we should be giving them solid footing to help them build themselves into whole people that can build community and society as well as themselves. We are dismayed at the amount of childhood depression and suicide we see but if we are not building more ways for children to see a future with them in it, so that they have something to look forward to, we will

continue to see this disturbing trend worsen. Sometimes that art class is the only reason a child will drag themselves into school and learn other things. I had a family member who suffered abuse and they also only came to school for their arts and because they were very quick at absorbing information they learned the things they cared a lot less about too. Instead of a lifetime of nothing special because this state not only barely supports the basics, but actively works to tear EVEN THAT down, how about we do the right thing? How about we make sure that tomorrow we have doctors because we've allowed kids to learn to have wonder about the human body, kids that program and design the next best innovation that makes our lives better and easier by understanding how math, art, form, and function work together. How about we improve upon the tools we give kids to express themselves to survive to see the next day of school and maybe adulthood, and while we're at it, maybe we quit finding ways to single kids out for negativity and instead hold up and nurture their gifts.

If we keep eroding the public school system we are looking at a future where some of these kids may not exist or never get to see their potential. We are looking at a future where there aren't enough doctors to go around and save lives, that includes the lives of people in this legislative body. There won't be enough nurses because they are leaving the profession. There won't be enough quality teachers if you don't pay them decent salaries. There won't be the kind cures for ailments that we have today that were death sentences 20 years ago if we keep this up or they might exist but they won't be available here in this state or even within the US because we drove all the talent away. The economic impacts of what this legislative body and the senate have been implementing have dire consequences, especially if SB1 passes. 90% of the children in this state are public school educated. It is delusional to believe that we can continue to neglect education in this state on this scale and not have major issues in 20 years when these kids are adults. Start working in your constituents interests and stop playing games. More of us are getting active and taking notice that this legislature is legislating and voting against the public interests. We take extreme umbridge when you take our tax dollars and turn around and spit in our kids faces.

As your constituent, I ask you to do your duty by the children of this state to vote yes on the Fair School Funding Plan and recalculate the current cost to educate each child as part of that plan. Anything less is a dereliction of duty and a violation of your oath of office to uphold the Constitution, as the underfunding of our schools is unconstitutional. Thank you for considering my testimony.