

**House Education Committee**

**Testimony regarding HB 96**

**February 25, 2025**

**Colleen O'Connell, Constituent in Columbus, Ohio**

Chair Fowler Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee, Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding public education funding in the Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026. I urge the committee to include the 3rd phase of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan in the state budget.

My name is Colleen O'Connell; I am a constituent living in Columbus, Ohio, proud product of public education, and a former Ohio middle school educator.

I want to ask that you consider that the cost of educating Ohio students who attend public schools—which includes over 90% of Ohio students—will not change whether or not the legislature implements the 3rd phase of the Fair School Funding Plan.

As far as I can tell, because the cost does not change based on whether or not its funded, this means that the cost to educate our children will be paid one of three ways:

1. The state legislature implements the 3rd phase of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan and finally begins to keep the promise that the state constitution makes to Ohio children that, no matter where they live, they will receive a comprehensive education because the state has provided a thorough and efficient system of public schools.
2. That, as they have done for decades, localities will bear even more inordinate funding burden for the public schools in their area, leaving it up to local taxpayers to make up for the legislature failing to uphold its constitutional burden.
3. That our children bear the cost through missed opportunities.

Unfortunately, I suspect that if the 3rd phase of the Fair School Funding Plan is not implemented, that the third way of “paying” is the most likely because taxpayers already feel overburdened in the cost to educate children in their school district boundaries, which is exactly why our state constitution saw fit *not* to leave this burden primarily on locality.

My experience in public school empowered me to be proud of who I am and to see my potential to lead in the real world. That's why I decided to become a public school teacher. I wanted to help create more equitable opportunities for students who may have circumstances like mine. I wanted the support I could offer to be available to ALL students, just as it was available to me.

As a middle school educator in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, I was proud of the work that fellow educators, school staff, and I did with our students to provide them with unparalleled opportunities to innovate and problem solve every single day.

I fear, however, that Ohio's children will not have these same opportunities. That's why I ask you to consider my testimony and choose to support the 90% of Ohio students who attend 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.

Thank you for your consideration. I am available to respond to any questions you may have.