

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 96
House Education Committee
2/25/2025

Vella King, Parent of Hillsdale Local Schools

Chair Fowler, Vice Chair Odioso and members of the Education committee of the Ohio House of Representatives:

My name is Vella King and I am a school board member serving in Hillsdale Local School district, a small consolidated rural farm district in Ashland County.

I began my school experience in a small-town rural school district but attended Catholic schools along with my 3 of my 4 brothers. Before the youngest started at that school, my parents made the choice to enroll us in public school because they were not happy with the educational rigor they were seeing and rightfully so. Two of my three brothers that had attended that school were far behind their peers and were held back to catch up the first year.

When my husband and I, who graduated from the same school district, were married and began our family, we were given family land in the small rural farm district we have come to love and value.

Our two children graduated from Hillsdale, our two grandsons have graduated and are enrolled in universities and our granddaughter is a sophomore and proud Hillsdale Falcon. Our daughter is also a high school intervention specialist in the district.

Over the years, I have seen opportunities in our district expanded but have also witnessed how unfunded mandates from the state have hindered those opportunities and also the district's budget. When are we going to be allowed to prepare our students for enrollment, employment or enlistment when they graduate rather than performing parental duties.

Last year, nearly 1 billion dollars from the education line item of the budget was unconstitutionally used to illegally fund Ed Choice voucher expansion to private schools. This despite the fact that parents, like mine, had made the decision to send their students to a private educational facility knowing they would be required to pay tuition. Of the roughly 10% of Ohio's students that attend private schools, and for those receiving the vouchers, only 17% are low income while Hillsdale has a poverty percentage of 38.63. In addition, 90% of Ohio's students, the public sector, received only 76% of state funding while the other 10%, the private sector, received 24%.

Private institutions are not held to the same educational requirements as public schools nor do they, on average, obtain the same educational excellence. They are also allowed to pick and choose who can be enrolled. In 2025, the average state share of the foundation funding is \$8240 but yet voucher recipients could receive up to \$8408 for high school students while our school only received \$4,356.17 in state funding.

The Fair School Funding law was designed to address the fact that school funding in Ohio has been found to be unconstitutional 4 times because it relies heavily on local property taxes to fund schools. It is the primary responsibility of the state, not local property owners, to fund public schools and that responsibility should be before any party affiliation. Currently, local share projections for school funding in 2026 is 65% and 2027 is 68%. In 2022, Ohio ranked 45th nationally in state percentage of funding at 34.2% versus a national average of 43.7%.

I am asking you to support Ohio's public-school students, and the communities members that elected you by fully funding the Fair School Funding appropriations at the most current funding base each year, to improve the weights of the categoricals included in the funding, to continue the necessary guarantee percentages that many of the 610 public schools need to keep their lights on and to eliminate the unsustainable and unconstitutional Ed Choice vouchers. Simply using the most current funding base would be a form of property tax relief for Ohio taxpayers.

If you continue down this path of the proposed educational line items in the HB96 budget bill, many schools including mine, will be forced to either make cuts to student programming and staff or go back to voters for a new levy. We were one of the schools who could not pass a RENEWAL levy in November. We are also one of the many schools in Ohio now on the 20-mill floor which means our voters will pay the same regardless of the ultimate passage or failure while losing millions in public utility monies. This is because voters don't understand Ohio's convoluted school funding process, do you? Please do what is right for Ohio public school students and those whom you represent.

If you need additional information from me, please do not hesitate to call me at 419.651.3227

Respectfully,

Vella King