

## Ohio House Bill 96 - Testimony

Hello, my name is John Spieser, and I have the privilege of serving as the Superintendent of Milford Exempted Village Schools. We serve nearly 6,000 students with the support of almost 700 dedicated staff members. Our goal is to make Milford a destination district where students can thrive, and we have worked tirelessly to achieve that vision.

Our academic excellence speaks for itself. We are proud to be recognized as the number one school district in Clermont County, ranked 15th in the Cincinnati Metro area—including Dayton and Northern Kentucky—placed in the top five percent of schools in Ohio, and in the top eight percent nationwide. We are an exemplary school district that is not afraid of competition, whether from our neighboring public schools, charter schools, or parochial institutions. We welcome that competition because we know that on an even playing field, Milford will continue to excel and thrive among our competitors. But we also know that fair competition requires fair funding, and without a strong state investment in public education, our ability to maintain the high standards our students and families deserve is at risk.

This level of success does not happen by chance. It is the result of passionate educators, engaged families, and a community that values education. But to continue delivering a high-quality education, we need the **full** support of our state lawmakers. While property values in our community have increased, our district's revenue has not kept pace—largely due to House Bill 920, which limits the amount of new revenue schools can collect from rising property values.

Our local taxpayers are already feeling this burden. Property values in our area have increased by more than 30%, yet the tax revenue has remained consistent with previous years. The state currently funds only 37% of our district's budget, leaving the remaining costs to be covered by our families, who are already facing economic pressures.

We have worked hard to be fiscally responsible, ensuring that every dollar is spent efficiently. But with less state funding, our families are left to fill the gap—forced to approve levy after levy just to maintain the high-quality education that has made Milford a Destination District. Milford Schools has not received additional operating funds since May of 2013, demonstrating our commitment to financial responsibility and purposeful spending to avoid overburdening our local community and taxpayers. We have already made nearly \$2 million in budget

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cuts going into fiscal year 2026, with additional reductions on the horizon to ensure we stay financially responsible. Our top priority remains putting students first, while doing everything we can to retain our incredible staff and keep our schools strong.

At the same time, we are being asked to abandon the very tools that have helped us succeed. Milford has been using mCLASS DIBELS as our screener, an evidence-based tool that has helped us identify student needs early and drive instructional success. But now, all districts across Ohio are being forced to switch to a new screener—one chosen for us—despite the time, energy, and resources we have invested. This move completely disregards the principle of local control, stripping districts and communities of the ability to choose what works best for their students. It is yet another example of a one-size-fits-all mandate that disrupts progress instead of supporting it.

But there comes a point where further cuts will directly impact students—reducing course offerings, increasing class sizes, and limiting opportunities in academics, arts, and athletics. We refuse to let this happen. Yet, under the current state budget proposal, Milford's share of state funding would shrink even further, making it even harder to provide the exceptional education our students deserve.

That is why I am urging legislators to take the following actions. First, protect the funding guarantee. The current plan calls for a five percent cut in fiscal year 2026 and a ten percent cut in fiscal year 2027—totaling nearly \$900,000 in cuts to Milford Schools. This is unacceptable, as it would force additional levies or program reductions, putting the burden directly on our families and staff.

Second, fully fund Phase Three of the Fair School Funding Plan. This includes updating the funding formula inputs so they accurately reflect today's education costs. The plan was designed to provide sustainable, predictable funding—something Ohio's schools desperately need.

Third, increase the state's minimum share from ten percent to twenty percent, in addition to updating the variables in the funding formula. Right now, the imbalance between local and state funding is growing, shifting more financial responsibility onto local communities.

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Milford Schools—like districts across Ohio—are committed to accountability and excellence. But excellence cannot be sustained without proper investment. The 1.7 million students in Ohio's public schools deserve better. They deserve a state government that prioritizes their future and invests in the schools that serve all students, not just a select few.

Milford is a Destination District because of our high expectations, strong community support, and commitment to student success. We will continue to do everything in our power to provide an exceptional education, but we need Ohio's lawmakers to do their part. I urge you to act now to fully fund public education in Ohio.