

**House Education Committee**  
**House Bill 96**  
**Mr. Todd Albright, Board of Education Member,**  
**Chardon Local Schools (Geauga)**  
**February 26, 2025**

Chair Arthur-Fowler, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the work you do for the students of the state of Ohio and for the opportunity to testify about House Bill 96.

My name is Todd Albright, I am a first term board member for the Chardon Local School District in Geauga County. We are a high performing school district that is mostly rural. We cover 88 square miles, and currently serve 2,450 students. Like many other districts we face a growing number of challenges, but we have through wise leadership, and skillful staff nearly topped them all.

In the three years that I have been on the board, I have seen that it takes grit and dedication to be an educator and to draw out the potential of every student. And it takes a great deal of resources too. But each victory is part of what makes a community thrive. Whether on the field, in the auditorium or at state level competitions, the community as a whole rises up and stands with its schools. We rejoice in their victory, and lament their defeat. Many times, I have seen many neighbors line the streets in all weather conditions to see buses of students leave the city to strive for victory and the honor of the district, and welcome them back with cheers late at night.

Public schools are the life of a community. Their success or failure gains real estate wealth or wipes it out. Their reputation draws investors or drives them away. Without strong schools a community has no real future, because what we do for the children around us declares plainly what we value and what we want our future to look like. There is no greater investment a community can make than in the raw potential of children. These communities and their public schools large and small when added together are the summation of our aspirations and hopes as a people and they determine our future economies, technological advancements, and our resilience.

I think this is why its written in our constitution that we shall establish a thorough and efficient public-school system in the state. I love the word thorough, it is such a

comprehensive word, meaning complete in regard to every detail, and that's why I'm grateful for you all, you are guardians of education you can lead us toward that goal, you can help to assure that education is complete and throughout the state whether in the home, in the public schools or in charter and private schools.

The public schools strive to fulfill that requirement for the largest portion of children, educating nearly 90% of Ohio's children, and where the greatest blessing is seen in public education is in the education of those who are economically disadvantaged, and 22% of our students are economically disadvantaged, some are homeless.

The district stakeholders currently bear 64% of the cost of educating our students, and through careful leadership and planning we have eliminated school fees so that no child is kept from participating because of lack in their family. That's a gift and a blessing. But the cost of educating students keeps steadily rising. And it's not the cost of the high-quality educators we have, whose wages on average rise by about 2.5%, it's the sapping cost of inflation which hits the hardest in the cost of buses, energy, safety, technology, and even in health insurance. Some of these areas have seen 20-50% increases and they aren't slowing down.

In addition to the economic challenge presented by House Bill 96 to all public schools, we face cuts at the federal level to Medicaid which supports our most vulnerable special needs learners. HB 15, which exempts all energy properties would result in a loss from public utility potential. HB 61 Would provide some relief to taxpayers, but would reduce homestead and rollback revenue by 50%. If these become a reality our school district will have a negative cash balance and be in fiscal oversight by 2028. There is pressure on education from every front. And these bills if passed will impact the futures of students in more than 300 districts and result in unvoted millage increases in districts that weren't on the 20 mil floor, but soon will be. This can all be avoided, or at least delayed if the Fair School Funding plan is fully phased in, and the inputs updated.

You are the stewards of state resources spent on education. You are the gatekeepers of the futures of tens of thousands of publicly educated students, and every dollar invested in these children will yield significant returns economically and socially. I'm a homeschool parent on a public-school board. I'm not here to oppose choice, I love and believe in the principle of supporting every student in the way they learn best, or the way their parents chose to train them up. We as a district aren't afraid of choice, we aren't asking you to cancel vouchers, we are asking you to stand behind your obligation

to maintain a thorough and efficient public-school system. We aren't afraid of competition, we thrive on it, because we know that if we offer excellent education services the students will stay, and they have.

We strive to deliver for every student every time what we call the four E's, which is the successful outcome of entrepreneurship, enrollment in higher education, enlistment in the armed services or fulfilling and gainful employment. Like most districts our students saw setbacks during Covid 19 that we have regained and then some, and we want to gain and hold more ground for them. You can help us help our students, you can help every district help its students by fully phasing in the Fair School Funding Act and updating the inputs. We need the formula fully implemented to ensure sustainability throughout the state. When funding is unpredictable, 5-year forecasts become defensive and not offensive. The result is a lack of maximum educational impact.

Please invest boldly in the future of our state, please stand behind the Fair School Funding Act.

In closing, I am asking you on behalf of the Chardon Local School District, and really every public-school district to fully implement the plan. Doing so is a commitment to every Ohio student, family and community. By doing so you are investing in community resilience, a more competitive workforce, and ultimately a brighter future for our state, one higher achievement at time. So please invest boldly.

I want to leave you with one final thought. Education is like a battleship, it can't turn on dime and it can't reverse course immediately, it takes 10 miles to make one turn. What you do here this year may not be immediately apparent, but if it is negative it will take time to turn around, and in the meanwhile the losses to students, families and communities may never be regained.

Chair Fowler Arthur and members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention. I'd be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.