

Thank you Chair Fowler-Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee.

My name is Stephanie Harless and I am a school board member in the Worthington School District. I have two children who go to school in Worthington and I am also a graduate of Columbus Public Schools.

I'd like to start today by sharing a little bit about our district. While some may view us as a small, suburban district, Worthington Schools is approximately 20 square miles and is comprised of families that live in Worthington, Westerville, Powell, and Columbus. Our 10,700 students speak 58 different languages across our 21 schools. We are the 14th largest district in the state and we are growing.

In Worthington, we are empowering a community of learners who will change the world. We are committed to providing high-quality academics, extra-curricular activities, and a variety of programs that allow us to meet each of our students where they are, how they come to us, and to prepare them for life outside of our school walls.

As it pertains to the Biennial Budget, I respect the state's desire to be fiscally responsible, making sure that our tax dollars have the most impact. I respect that escalating taxes, including the property taxes that disproportionately fund many of our districts, can be a burden. But this is a burden that we, as a collective, agree to in order to ensure we have the services we need as a society. Today, we look to you to be thoughtful and strategic about how you spend these tax dollars to their greatest benefit.

What better way to ensure that Ohio can continue to succeed economically, in thought leadership, and beyond, than to invest our tax dollars in a place where 90% of our students (our future) are being educated? The foundation of a strong community, and a strong state is a strong, appropriately funded public education system. If this were not the case, and if you as the legislature didn't feel this way, then I don't believe you would have invested heavily in programs to support the science of reading. I don't believe you would have invested in programs like the 3rd grade reading guarantee. You, like the rest of us, know it is critical to provide research-based, comprehensive education programs to all of our youth.

I come to you, not in opposition to charter schools or private schools and I am certainly not anti-choice. However, I am asking you to be good stewards of our tax dollars. To not take away funding from public schools at a time when they need them the most.

Our enrollment projections show an increase in enrollment beyond the biennium, yet under the current formula, we would be losing over two million dollars per year in state funding. As you know, although property valuations increased significantly in Franklin county last year, due to House Bill 920, schools that are not on the 20 mil floor will see very limited increases in revenue. In 2020, Worthington received 31% of the base cost to education a student. Under this proposed formula, a short 5 years later, we would drop to the 10% funding floor, even though our relative wealth as a district has not increased. As you continue to review the budget, I am asking you to ensure that districts who are continuing to grow do not lose funding. I am asking that you prioritize the needs of

90% of our state's students. And finally, I am asking that you ensure public education is funded fairly and equitably. Thank you.