

Testimony Opposing Governor DeWine's Proposed Education Budget

Chairperson, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. My name is Lucy Farr, and I am a concerned resident of Columbus, Ohio, as well as a school counselor for Columbus City Schools. I am here to voice my opposition to Governor DeWine's proposed education budget and to express the negative consequences it would have on Columbus City Schools and the broader community.

As we all know, education is the cornerstone of any community's success. The proposed budget would drastically undermine the quality of education in Columbus City Schools, one of the largest and most diverse school districts in the state. For years, our schools have faced financial strain and uncertainty, and this budget proposal would only exacerbate these challenges.

Impact on Columbus City Schools

Under Governor DeWine's proposed budget, Columbus City Schools would lose \$45 million in the funding they desperately need. This budget does not account for the increasing number of students in our district, many of whom come from underprivileged backgrounds or have additional educational needs. Without the necessary funding, our schools will struggle to provide the quality education these students deserve.

Columbus City Schools are already facing overcrowded classrooms, underpaid teachers, and outdated materials. The lack of investment in education has contributed to the widening achievement gap and the challenges of supporting students with diverse needs. The proposed budget would worsen these conditions, placing an even greater burden on our teachers and staff, and ultimately impacting the students who need resources the most.

The cuts proposed in this budget will limit our ability to hire and retain qualified teachers, provide special education services, and implement enrichment programs that allow students to thrive. In short, it will directly harm the educational outcomes for children in Columbus.

The Critical Role of School Counselors

One area that stands to suffer significantly from the proposed cuts is the availability and support provided by school counselors. School counselors play a vital role in the emotional, social, and academic development of students. We help guide children through the challenges they face both in school and at home, particularly for those dealing with trauma, mental health issues, or personal struggles that impact their ability to succeed academically.

In Columbus City Schools, counselors are integral in addressing the growing mental health needs of our students. We provide one-on-one counseling, crisis intervention, college and career readiness support, and vital connections to community resources. We are often the first line of defense against the increasing mental health challenges that have become more prevalent, especially in underfunded, high-poverty communities.

The proposed budget would severely limit the district's ability to hire and retain enough school counselors to meet the needs of the students. With increasing pressure on our schools and the rising need for mental health support, this cut could leave many students without the assistance and support they need to thrive.

In fact, the November 2023 tax levy, which was passed by Columbus voters, specifically aimed to increase resources for essential student services, including the hiring of more school counselors. The levy was approved with the understanding that it would help expand access to these critical services. However, with Governor DeWine's proposed cuts in state funding, the district's ability to fulfill this promise is now at risk. The state's role in supporting school counselors cannot be overstated; without adequate state funding, the expansion of these services is jeopardized, leaving students vulnerable and unsupported.

November 2023 Tax Levy and the Burden on Local Taxpayers

In November 2023, the voters of Columbus approved a critical tax levy designed to support our public schools. The levy was passed with the understanding that it would help provide much-needed resources for our schools, including investments in teachers, infrastructure, and educational programs. However, if Governor DeWine's budget is passed, the reduction in state funding will undermine the very purpose of that levy.

The local tax levy was an attempt to address the funding gaps created by a lack of sufficient state support. The approval of this levy by Columbus voters was a statement of the community's commitment to education. However, it was also a recognition that the state has not been living up to its responsibility to fund schools equitably. By cutting state funding, Governor DeWine's proposed budget essentially shifts more of the burden to local taxpayers, which further compounds the inequities in school funding.

Rather than reinforcing the state's commitment to public education, this budget shifts more of the responsibility onto local residents who are already struggling with rising costs. The result will be a greater financial burden on families and an even more inequitable distribution of educational resources across the state.

A Call for Fairer Funding

In conclusion, I urge this committee to reject Governor DeWine's proposed education budget. Columbus City Schools—and indeed, all of Ohio's public schools—need a budget that reflects the reality of our communities' needs. This proposal only deepens the challenges facing our schools and threatens to undo the progress made through local initiatives like the November 2023 tax levy.

Instead of cutting funding to our schools, we must focus on making investments that will uplift our students, support our teachers, and ensure that every child, regardless of background or zip code, has the opportunity to succeed. It is time for Ohio to fulfill its constitutional obligation to provide a high-quality education for all its residents. I respectfully ask that you consider the future of our children, especially in terms of their emotional well-being and academic success, and vote against this budget proposal.

Thank you,

Lucy Farr