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Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Sara Watson. I am the parent of two students attending Columbus City Schools (CCS). I write to urge the committee to continue phasing the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan into Ohio's budget.

The Superintendent of Columbus City Schools, Dr. Angela Chapman, recently announced that our district—home to a very large numbers of high-need learners—stands to lose \$45 million dollars over the next two school years under the Governor's proposed budget. Why? Because the current formula calculations of districts' State Share of Instruction are one-sided. They include increased property tax valuations but do not update the costs of educating K-12 students in 2025. They therefore assume districts like CCS have more "local capacity" to support K-12 education than they actually do.

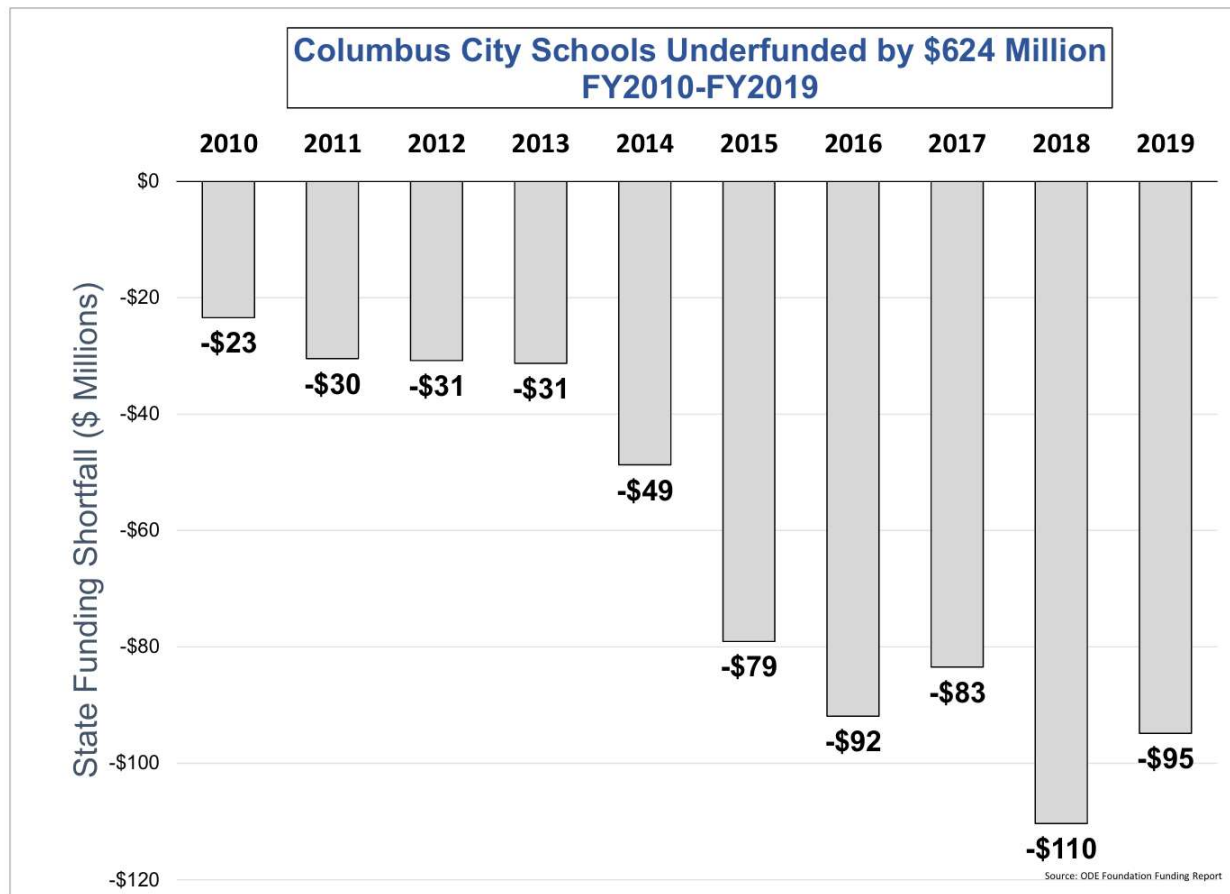
The Executive Budget proposed by Governor DeWine is a betrayal of the spirit of the Fair School Funding Plan— and it will hurt Ohio's public school districts. If this proposed funding formula is passed, our district will be forced to use money from our recent operating levy to offset these state SSI losses.

This is a cost that we cannot bear.

Students attending Columbus public schools are already underserved on multiple dimensions. Both my kids' school buildings are more than "outdated", they are literally crumbling down around them. Students don't have access to modern technology or athletic facilities or fine arts facilities. And it's not just the facilities that are subpar. CCS can't even afford the most basic of extra-curricular activities, all of which are available in neighboring and higher-income districts. For example, if CCS students want to join an after-school math club, they have to arrange their own transportation because the district cannot afford to provide it. There is also inadequate funding for teachers to serve as advisors for extra-curricular clubs. Many CCS teachers choose not to advise after-school clubs (which they would have to do without pay) because they can find paid opportunities in neighboring districts.

And that is the situation under the current budget! If this new biennial budget goes through unchanged, the situation on the ground for our students will be even worse.

Lawmakers should also remember that these proposed cuts to public school funding come on top of the previous decade of state under-investment in many Ohio school districts like CCS. In the years before the Fair School Funding Plan, approximately 20-25 percent of Ohio districts received *less* state funding than the Foundational Formula specified. One of the biggest losers from our previous “Unfair School Funding” system was CCS. Despite very high levels of child poverty, as well as large numbers of English-language learners and special needs students, CCS was deprived of an astonishing \$624 million in state funding between 2010 and 2019.¹



¹ Although the absolute value of underfunding was smaller in many other Ohio school districts, many of them suffered from larger reductions from the formula when considered in percentage terms. For example, in 2018, Olentangy Local SD was receiving 80 percent less than the allocated formula amount, Dublin 38 percent less, and Worthington approximately 20 percent less—losses of \$2169, \$844, and \$486 per student respectively (OBM 2018). Between 2010 and 2019, the Ohio’s funding system deprived “capped” school districts of more than \$4 billion in state funding.

The idea that our lawmakers would reject the core principles of the Fair School Funding Plan and approve a K-12 education budget which once again undersells our public schools—and especially high-poverty districts like CCS—is deeply distressing. That lawmakers would do so to funnel funding to universal vouchers (which subsidize affluent families and prop up religious schools while imposing minimal accountability requirements) is even more upsetting.

I ask you to consider my testimony and choose to support the ninety percent of Ohio students who attend public schools. Please continue phasing the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan into Ohio's budget.

Let the Fair School Funding plan do what it was designed to do: properly fund Ohio public school districts and eliminate the funding inequities of our previous system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Best,

Sara Watson

Columbus, Ohio