

Interested Party Testimony for House Bill 96
House Education Committee
March 4, 2025
Marisa LaPalomato

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Marisa LaPalomato. I am a long-time Columbus, Ohio resident, a product of public schooling at all levels, a parent of a child attending public schools, and a volunteer tutor of public school students. I'm here to urge the committee to continue phasing the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan into Ohio's budget.

My daughter has had the good fortune to attend public schools (Columbus City Schools) where she learns alongside other children of all abilities and from all walks of life - children who are afforded the same opportunities to learn and grow. Children whose needs and abilities are respected, by caring teachers and staff members who do their best to meet a child where they are, and provide the best services for their individual needs.

But it is not my own child for whom I worry, if public schools are not fully funded in Ohio. I know in my heart that cutting public school funding, especially to larger, more diverse districts like Columbus City Schools where the majority of students are people of color and many students come from vulnerable and disadvantaged populations. I know from my experience tutoring at several Columbus City Schools that our children just want to thrive. They want to be "good" students and humans, they want to become strong readers, confident mathematicians, and be educated about the ways of the world. Our public schools provide an invaluable service to our children - they educate EVERYONE. They do not turn you away because they do not have the specialized services to meet your IEP needs. They do not turn you away because you missed a year of school due to COVID shutdowns but are still being held to the same standards of learning. Increasing funding to private and charter schools through the use of vouchers is only going to increase the already disproportionate impact to our students with the highest needs, as schools who do not have to play by the same rules and educate EVERY child will get more funding and students with higher needs will be forced to stay in public schools where funding has been cut. If the government is going to fund private and charter schools with public money, then they should have to play by the same rules as public schools.

Early intervention, a service provided almost exclusively by our public school systems, is critically important to our students - and in the long term it saves

money. Supporting our youngest students and meeting their needs sets them up for success, and saves society a lot of money in the long term, in educational dollars, social services, and health care.

I testify today as a parent, as a taxpayer, and an advocate for ALL children in the State of Ohio. I ask you to consider my testimony and choose to support the 90% of Ohio students who attend public schools. Please continue phasing the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan into Ohio's budget. I ask you to remember when you are casting your vote that a rising tide lifts all boats, and within a community we share in one another's successes AND hardships. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Marisa LaPalomente