

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 Natasha Wheatley-Caffrey. I am a mother of two young children with a third on the way. I'm here to urge the committee to continue phasing the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan into Ohio's budget.

My oldest child is 5. He attends an elementary school half a mile from our house. Having a school so close to us means that we can model a healthy lifestyle choice with him by riding our bikes to drop off and pick-up. His elementary school is small. There are only 2 classrooms for each grade. At after school events, it feels like the whole neighborhood shows up. People embrace the school and all it gives to our children. The support staff, the administrators, and even some of the upper-level teachers all know my son's name.

When he started at the beginning of the year, school was a hard adjustment. He's a shy kid and it takes him time to feel comfortable. At first, he was upset most days either at drop-off or at pick-up. Now, he runs into school most mornings totally excited. At pick-up, he likes to give the school librarian, who assists outside with dismissal, a huge high-five on his way out. At bedtime, he has started to answer the question, "What was your favorite part of today?" with, "school". Academically, he has hit all his milestones so far. The people who choose to work in public education made that change possible.

From this description, you may think that we live in a wealthy suburban community or perhaps a small town. But he attends a Title 1 school in the Columbus City Schools District, a district that will lose \$45 million dollars over the next two years at your hand if you move forward with this plan. Why are vouchers for unregulated private schools and profit-making charter schemes more important than my child's elementary school which delivers great quality education and a caring community—despite the obvious challenges and the lack of respect shown to it. We as a society should be funding schools like my son's more, not less.

The new proposed funding formula doesn't acknowledge the fact that the costs of educating a child have increased across every district. Or at least it doesn't address that is true for public schools, the extra \$500 million the plan gives charters and vouchers suggests you can acknowledge it in some cases. The cuts to public schools across the state are cruel and unnecessary. You could follow the original bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan and still have hundreds of millions left for charters if you wanted. If you move forward with this budget, you are actively choosing to support only 10% of children in this state instead of ALL Ohio children.

Public school is the best option for my son and my family. For those of you on the committee who say you are about school choice, why are you taking my choice, as a parent, for public schools away?

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. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.