

Testimony on House Bill 96 to the Ohio House Finance committee

March 7th, 2025

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, HD-71 Member Dean, and members of the House Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 96, the budget bill for Fiscal Years 2026-2027. My name is Dr. Dorothée Bouquet, and I serve as a School Board Member for the Yellow Springs Exempted Village School District in Greene County. I come before you today to express **deep concern over the proposed reductions in state funding and their impact on our schools and our community.**

Yellow Springs Schools are on the Fair School Funding Plan formula. Despite this, we are facing a projected **reduction in state funding of \$175,000 in Fiscal Year 2026 (~6%) and an additional \$190,000 reduction in Fiscal Year 2027 (~7%)—a total loss of over \$500,000 in state revenue** over the next two years. This is largely due to the continued use of outdated **FY22 data in the funding formula, rather than updating calculations to reflect FY24 figures, and the fact that the proposed budget only pushes for a reduced implementation of the third phase of the Fair School Funding Plan.** As a result, our district and many others in the region are experiencing **cuts in state funding at a time when costs continue to rise.**

These reductions in state funding place an even greater burden on our local taxpayers. Our community already shoulders 75% of our school funding through property taxes, while only 25% comes from the state. When the state reduces its financial support, the burden shifts even further onto our residents, who are already facing rising property values and cost-of-living increases. This is simply not sustainable for a small, rural community like ours.

To put this into perspective, the average residential property value in Yellow Springs increased by 24% in 2023, according to a *Dayton Daily News* article published on October 27, 2023. While our residents remain committed to supporting public education, they have also made it clear that they cannot bear the weight of additional tax increases. At the same time, we have taken on an unprecedented \$55 million school facilities bond to replace outdated, inefficient buildings—some of which still have their original 1950s windows and discontinued HVAC systems. While we are proud of this investment in our schools, it represents a 37-year financial commitment that our community will be paying off for decades to come.

We have worked diligently to be responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars. When it was time to renew our operating levies, we proposed a substitute levy that did not increase the total amount collected and would have stabilized funding for the district in perpetuity. However, it failed on the first attempt—a sign of voter fatigue and growing tax resistance in small communities like ours. After reworking the proposal and returning to the ballot, it eventually passed, but only as a 10-year levy rather than a permanent solution. This means we will have to return to voters again to secure operational funding in the near future, adding further uncertainty to our financial planning.

This challenge is not unique to Yellow Springs. Many other districts in Greene and Montgomery Counties are also facing reductions in state funding under this budget proposal. The most recent election cycle in Ohio demonstrated the difficulty school districts face in securing local funding:

- Only 51% of school levies passed.
- Renewal levies, which historically passed at 90%, dropped to 71% approval.
- Just 25% of new levies were approved on the first attempt.

Meanwhile, the universal voucher program continues to divert nearly \$1 billion in taxpayer dollars away from public schools and into private institutions. At the same time, House Speaker Huffman has suggested that further reductions to the Fair School Funding Plan could be on the table. Public schools cannot afford to lose more state funding while vouchers continue to expand unchecked.

I urge you to **update the funding formula to reflect FY24 data** and **to only support a state operating budget that includes the full, bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan**. It is imperative to reconsider these proposed reductions in state funding that will harm our district and many others across Ohio. If these cuts remain in place, rural and small communities like ours will struggle to sustain their schools, and the quality of public education will suffer.

Public education is a shared responsibility between the state and local communities. We cannot afford for the state to shift its financial responsibility onto our taxpayers while simultaneously expanding costly voucher programs. The balance of public education funding in Ohio must be restored before we reach a breaking point.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dr. Dorothée Bouquet
School Board Member
Yellow Springs Exempted Village School District