

To whom it may concern,

I am submitting this in strong opposition to Governor Mike DeWine's proposed budget cuts to public education in House Bill 96. I am proud to be school social worker working in the community and school settings for 10 years. I have experienced and seen firsthand the impacts loss of funding can have. Ohio Schools are already struggling to provide the quality education that all kids deserve. We are all still working through the gaps and impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on education. With these proposed cuts in funding it is most likely that our Columbus City district families will lose access to vital services and resources. Resources that could impact their futures. For many of our students' school is a safe haven. A place where they can learn, connect with peers, be fed, further develop their interests, and gain life experience.

As a school social worker, I work in multiple schools and help with addressing the needs of a variety of age groups. Our students face numerous challenges- mental health struggles, suicidality, learning challenges, disabilities, poverty, homelessness, instability at home, and unfortunately at times abuse and neglect. It is not rare for me to complete multiple suicide risk assessments during the school week, these assessments can save lives. I can work with families and our mental health services to get children linked to needed services. These budget cuts would most likely mean cuts to our support staff- school nurses, school counselors, and school social workers- these needs cannot be met by overworked teachers.

I see daily that educators provide so much more than education. Please, consider the impact this would have on all our Ohio children receiving public education. Listen to your constituents, Columbus City voters voted in favor of increased funding for Columbus City Schools. This is going to put a later strain on our other state resources and systems. Not only would this be a callous decision, economically it does not make sense. Education is a protective factor- increasing economic stability, improving physical health outcomes, increased detection and intervention of other potential disabilities, and a decrease in criminal legal involvement. We need our children to have adequate education and experience so that when they graduate, they are active in our communities and work force. Please vote no to these proposed budget cuts and send the message to our state that we care about Ohio children.

Ashlee Fielding, LISW-S
School Social Worker
Columbus, Ohio