



## LAKEWOOD CITY SCHOOLS

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### House Finance Committee

#### House Bill 96

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Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill (HB) 96, the biennial budget.

My name is Kent R. Zeman and I serve as the CFO for the Lakewood City in Cuyahoga County. The Lakewood City School District provides education to 4,200 Pre-K to 12 students, 150 vocational students, and 100 alternative school students in eleven buildings. Lakewood CSD is First Ring Suburb of Cleveland and is approximately five square miles.

As a CFO in Lakewood CSD, I see firsthand how our schools shape not just individual student futures, but the vitality of our entire community. That's why I'm writing to you about the Fair School Funding Plan - because our schools thrive, our communities thrive, our economy thrives, and Ohio thrives.

The Fair School Funding Plan provides an objective, rational, and transparent solution to school funding. Created in collaboration with school district leaders and expert practitioners, it translates real student needs into concrete resources. For example, the formula accounts for the actual costs of providing essential education components like appropriate class sizes, student support services, and educational technology - resources that directly impact student success in today's world.

However, for the formula to work as designed, it needs to be fully implemented with updated inputs. Research consistently shows that education investment generates significant returns. Each dollar invested in education can generate economic benefits through increased earnings and reduced social costs.

***I am writing you to ask on behalf of my students, my district, and the community I serve to request that the House continues the phase-in of the formula with updated base cost inputs.*** This will provide the stability and predictability our schools need to create accurate five-year forecasts and implement sustainable educational programming, and will account for the inflation we are all experiencing. Lakewood CSD is a guarantee district with stable enrollment. Our enrollment over the last four years has remained constant at 4,200 students. Under the FSFP, Lakewood is considered a wealthy District and currently is funded at the State minimum of 10%. Fully funding the FSFP is critical to our programming so that students are "workforce ready." We need to invest in the formula in order to invest in the pipeline of future leaders and our future workforce. DEW led a study to determine the cost of educating student who are economically disadvantaged. Over

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half of Ohio students are considered economically disadvantaged. In our district the percentage is 43% and we have seen this percentage increasing Year-over-Year. Providing the adequate resources for some of our most challenging students will continue to grow over the next biennium. In addition, as a refugee community our English Language Learners (ELL) population has significantly increased since 2020. Lakewood has traditionally had a large ELL population, however, the growth over the last four years has exceeded our historical increases. All of the students mentioned along with those not mentioned are the fabric of the Lakewood community and the future of our great State.

As a guarantee district, we are extremely concerned with proposed reductions to the guarantee. Guarantees should be maintained until the formula has been fully implemented with updated inputs, including updates to categorical funding based on the state-commissioned cost studies. Guarantees prevent districts from receiving less state aid than in previous years, due to increasing property values and income, static base cost inputs, declining enrollment, or a combination of these factors. While some argue that guarantees artificially inflate funding levels, the root problem lies in the asymmetry between updating local capacity measures and base cost inputs. The Governor's comment referring to guarantees funding empty seats is not representative of the Lakewood City Schools, as stated earlier, Lakewood CSD's enrollment has remained constant over the last four years and current projections show that trend continuing during the next biennium. If enacted, the Lakewood City School district would see a reduction in funding in excess of \$2.3 million dollars over the next biennium while still serving the same number of students.

We need the formula fully implemented to ensure sustainability throughout the state. When the future of funding is unpredictability, districts are not able to plan for student needs and implement the programming necessary in their communities and schools.

In closing, the Fair School Funding Plan represents more than just a funding formula - it represents our commitment to every Ohio student, family, and community. By fully implementing this plan, we invest in stronger communities, a more competitive workforce, and a brighter future for Ohio. Thank you for your consideration of these crucial next steps in supporting Ohio's educational excellence.

Chair Stewart and members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,



Kent R. Zeman, CFO

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