

**Finance Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
House Bill 96**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Rose Sweeny, and members of the Finance Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96.

My name is Kristy Meyer. I am a proud product of Westerville City Schools. My husband and I are raising two kids who also attend Westerville City Schools. We love the Westerville City Schools District.

As a mom and a taxpayer, I provide this testimony today to urge you to:

- Fully fund the Fair School Formula plan;
- Update the cost inputs to 2025 for FY 2026 & 2027;
- Keep the state share at FY 2025 percentages for FY 26 & 27
- Update the funding for Special Education in line with the completed studies;
- No longer require our school district to administer services to students in non-public schools; and,
- No longer require school districts to transport children to non-public schools.

When my husband and I were expecting our first child, we knew we wanted our kids to attend public schools—just as he did in Lakewood Local and I did, as mentioned, in Westerville City Schools. Like nearly 90% of Ohio families, we chose public education. Yet, despite this overwhelming choice, Ohio's public school funding remains inequitable and inadequate.

Westerville City Schools receives just \$3,000 per student in state funding—the same amount as in 2021—while inflation has risen nearly 22% since then. Meanwhile, non-public school students receive over \$6,000 or \$8,000, plus additional publicly funded services. This funding gap unfairly penalizes families who choose public education and limits resources for the majority of Ohio's students.

Since 2021, Westerville City Schools has been underfunded by \$29.1 million with the state's funding formula. Over the years, reductions in state support for public schools have forced districts to rely more on local taxpayers through levies. If the state would fully fund the Fair School Formula and update the cost inputs, as well as stop sending more than twice the amount of our taxpayer dollars to families choosing private schooling, our Schools would be better funded and School Districts would not have to ask for such big levies.

Some claim it is cheaper to educate students in non-public schools, but that is simply false. For example, The Wellington Academy in Columbus tuition starts at \$22,500 and rises to roughly \$33,000 per student per year. Furthermore, public school districts are legally required to transport non-public school students and provide special education services at non-public

schools, which benefits those going to private schools, but further drains public school resources that could otherwise benefit the students within the district

The impact of this funding disparity also impacts our most vulnerable, our special needs students. Westerville City Schools serves 14,697 students, 16% of whom have special needs. Special education classrooms require smaller class sizes—typically eight students per teacher, compared to 25-30 in general education—along with additional instructional aides; nursing services; speech. occupational and physical therapy; and specialized equipment such as adaptive tools and changing tables. These are real costs that the state must account for when funding public education.

If the Fair School Funding Formula were fully funded, updated with FY 25 cost inputs for FY 2026 and 2027, and special needs costs were updated, our district could better provide the necessary support for all students. Additionally, eliminating the requirement for public schools to subsidize non-public education would allow districts to focus resources where they are needed most—on the students they are responsible for educating.

To be clear, I am not saying parents should not have a choice in their children's education. However, the majority of Ohio families choose public education, and they should not be penalized for doing so. Westerville City Schools stretches every dollar to provide high-quality, student-centered learning opportunities that prepare children for the workforce and productive citizenship. Yet, the district is being asked to do more with less. Over the biennium, our district is projected to lose another nearly \$7 million in state funding after already facing significant cuts.

Public education is the backbone of a strong, healthy community and state. The Fair School Funding Formula, a bipartisan, research-backed plan, must be fully funded and implemented now with updated cost inputs. I urge policymakers to take immediate action to ensure that Ohio's public schools receive the resources they need to serve all students equitably and effectively.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.