

Testimony for House Bill 96
House Finance Committee
March 11, 2025

Amanda S. Fontana, MSW

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Finance committee for the Ohio House of Representatives:

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony today. My name is Amanda S. Fontana. My family and I live in New Philadelphia, Ohio. I am the mother of Lena, a fifth grader in public schools who is Autistic, Dyslexic and Gifted. I am also the mother of two previous public-school students, Lilli, 23 years old, who is developmentally disabled and profoundly Deaf. Ethan is 21 years old and a Senior at Bowling Green State University, where he will be graduating this spring. Additionally, I am an adjunct professor in Canton, Ohio, and a member of the New Philadelphia City Schools Board of Education. Today, I am writing to you as a mother in support of fully funding Ohio's public schools in the budget bill.

Public education was the only opportunity for my oldest daughter Lilli, a student with significant disabilities, to access an education. As we know, public schools are the only schools required to accept students with disabilities and provide them with the accommodations and interventions needed to obtain an education. My son, Ethan, participated in programs through public school for low-income families such as Title Reading and Big Brother/Big Sister. My youngest daughter, Lena, needed additional interventions for her Dyslexia that our public schools provided. By fourth grade, she no longer needed those interventions and was excelling in her public school. So much so, she outscored her peers on the Ohio State Tests last year. All this has been possible because of programs through public schools.

Our public schools are currently in danger of no longer being able to provide these opportunities for students because of the lack of state funding. We are losing good teachers and staff as costs go up, and funding goes down. In our local district, our buildings are a hundred years old, have no AC, are not accessible to students with disabilities, are not equipped to handle the infrastructure of new technology, and some do not even have walls! The district must use a large portion of the school's budget to maintain the buildings just to stay in code. Leaving less and less funding for teacher salaries, and much-needed programs, and services for our students. People are leaving the area because our schools are literally falling apart.

Our public schools are the foundation and the heart of our community. If you have never been to New Philadelphia, Ohio, let me tell you it is a beautiful small town. We are fortunate to have the fantastic Tuscora park, the first ever school in Ohio (Schoenbrunn, 1772), and a rich history full of tradition. This includes one of Ohio's longest-running high school football rivalries (127 years). New Philadelphia, located in the heart of Tuscarawas County, is a community where people stayed to raise their kids, or moved back to after college when they were ready to start a family. Sadly, the opposite is happening now. Much of that is due to the poor conditions of our public schools. Our children need schools that are compatible with learning and equipped with technology that allows our students to keep up with the advancements of our society. Our children deserve to have schools with walls to keep them safe! This only happens if the state upholds the promises enshrined to our children in our Ohio Constitution by fully funding our public schools.

Again, I support fully funding Ohio's public schools so that all children, including children with disabilities, children from low-income families, and our community, are not negatively impacted by the loss of access to teachers and crumbling buildings caused by the lack of state funding. I ask you to please consider my testimony and vote yes to implementing the Fair School Funding Plan with the addition of the cost inputs in the budget.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Amanda S. Fontana