

April 2, 2025

Witness Testimony

Submitted to: House Finance Committee

Bill: HB 96 - Operating Budget 2026-27

Submitted by: Melissa Petrea

Email: melissa.petera@gmail.com

Phone: (419) 344-7029

Dear Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and all other House Finance Committee Members -

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Melissa Petrea. I am a Perrysburg, Ohio resident, who came here today to express my deep concern regarding the current state of public education funding in Ohio. The intent of my testimony, made here today, is to urge you to increase the allocations for public school education funding within the 2026-27 biennial budget to fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan using updated base costs.

To provide a little background, I am a 2005 College of Business graduate from Bowling Green State University. I have worked in the fields of Finance, Marketing, Analysis and most recently Education as a certified public school teacher in my district. Prior to my time in Education I stayed home to care for my three young children. It has been my time working within the schools that has led me here today. I see the crowded classrooms, buildings in need of repair, and the overwhelming need for paraprofessionals and intervention specialists to provide a quality and effective education to our children. This is my perspective, from one of the wealthier school districts in the state. I can only imagine what the view from some of the lesser fortunate districts looks like.

The Ohio Fair School Funding Plan, requires additional funding to fully implement, and regular updates to its base cost to accurately reflect the true cost of educating students in today's environment. Inflation, increased technology costs, and evolving student needs necessitate ongoing adjustments. The base cost within the formula must also be updated to reflect the increased cost of teacher salaries, benefits, materials, technology, and facility maintenance. The proposed 2026-27 biennial budget would decrease state funding to public school districts by \$103.4 million over the next two fiscal years. Specifically, within the Perrysburg School District this would be a reduction in 2 million dollars of state funds. This will directly impact the ability to provide quality education and maintain essential programs for our students.

Ohio school districts are forced to rely on constant local property tax levies to maintain basic operations. There were 142 Ohio school levies on the ballot in November of 2024. Half of these levies failed. Perrysburg School District, specifically, has failed to pass the last three levies on the ballot. Our district continues to receive 5 star report card ratings and does this while maintaining a per pupil expenditure \$1,000 below the state average, but residents can't sustain the current funding model making it nearly impossible to pass a levy. This should be an

alarming indicator to state legislatures. This constant need for levies creates instability, and makes long term planning nearly impossible for school districts. Recently the house passed HB 28, eliminating the authority to levy replacement property tax levies. Further financially harming Ohio public schools, without any plan to offset this.

I believe the EdChoice voucher program diverts critical resources away from public schools. This diversion of funds disproportionately affects students in underfunded districts. The non-public schools receiving these state funds lack the same level of oversight and accountability as public schools. Public schools are accountable to taxpayers and are subject to rigorous standards and assessments, all of which are costly and impact each public school district's bottom line. Currently, in Ohio, 91% of students attend public schools, yet we are prioritizing the funding of the 9%. Voucher spending amounts to 1 billion dollars annually. Recent data shows 90% of voucher recipients are not low-income qualified, which was the original intent of the program. Furthermore, reviewing data from reports.education.ohio.gov the number of non-public school students from 2014 (175,667) to 2024 (173,156) did not increase in Ohio, but the voucher recipients increased by 120,000 students, or 800 million dollars. This illustrates that new students aren't taking advantage of the program, but rather we are rebating students who were already attending non-public schools prior to the expansion.

The Ohio Constitution, Article VI, Section 2, mandates that the state provide a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state; but no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state. It does not appear the state is fulfilling this constitutional obligation.

Across history and throughout the world, civilized societies have consistently prioritized education. There are many valid reasons for this. As societies become more complex, they require a skilled workforce to maintain and advance their economies. Education provides the foundation for scientific research, technological development, and artistic creativity. It fosters a culture of inquiry and innovation, which drives progress and prosperity.

Ohio has a critical decision to make. We can invest in our future by prioritizing education, or continue down a path of defunding public schools. The latter will result in lower economic growth, decreased state tax revenue, increased poverty, increased crime, poorer health, and increased public health costs. Ohio is currently ranked 36th by US News & World Report in best states to live in the US for 2025. If we want any chance of changing this, the choice is clear, as companies and families look for states to relocate to and stay long term we must invest in our public education system.

I would like to share the findings from a recent Scioto Analysis study, a company that specializes in providing evidence based research, specifically for policy makers. They measured the economic impact of changes in K-12 school spending. They found that if Ohio increased its school spending by about \$2,800 per student, or \$4.7 billion, the state could see net economic benefits ranging between \$23 and \$90 billion. In contrast, a reduction in spending of \$3,500 per student would create economic losses between \$30 and \$120 billion.

As Ohio House Finance Committee Members, I implore you to, increase the allocations for public education in the proposed state biennial budget for 2026-27 and to fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan using updated base costs. This is financially achievable if we prioritize Public Education for all Ohio students over the EdChoice voucher program expansion.

The testimony I have shared with you all today, is on behalf of all Ohians deeply concerned for the state of public education in Ohio, and in all sincerity, the overall fate of our state. Thank you for taking the time to listen today. I truly hope some of what was said here today resonated enough for adjustments to be made.

Kind Regards,
Melissa Petrea