

Interested Party Testimony for House Bill 96
House Finance Committee
March 30, 2025

Amanda Sue Fontana

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Amanda Sue Fontana. I am a parent of two adults who graduated from public schools and one who is a current elementary public school student. We live in New Philadelphia, Ohio, where I also serve on the New Philadelphia City Schools Board of Education. I am testifying today out of concern for our public school students, teachers, and public schools if the budget bill does not implement the Fair School Funding Plan with the cost inputs and guarantees. I support fully funding Ohio's public schools in the budget bill.

New Philadelphia is a small town in Tuscarawas County, part of Ohio's Appalachian region. As a parent and school board member, I have deep concerns for the state of our local public schools. In my district, we have schools that are 100 years old. We do not have cooling systems in our elementary buildings, and we have been forced to use calamity days when it has not been safe for the children to be in the buildings due to excessive heat. We have boiler systems so old that we can not get parts when they break down, leaving us to spend hundreds of thousands on new systems. Our buildings are not equipped with the advanced technology of our fire department or updated codes. Our Fire Department's walkie-talkies can not speak to each other while in the building, nor do we have automatic locking doors that are now required. This alone is roughly \$250,000 to update. We must utilize spaces such as hallways and utility closets for our students with disabilities to get services. Our building where our second and third graders attend, does not have walls! We have had to use make-shift partitions out of plastic with curtains as doors!

Our teachers and staff do an amazing job with what they have and with our students, but the reality is our buildings are not conducive for learning, they are not ADA accessible, and they are not safe! The money we spend yearly just to keep up to code or for repairs on old, outdated mechanisms should be spent on students and programs, but because of the gravity of the state of our buildings, it is used for repairs.

Last November, we were forced to put a bond on the ballot; needless to say, it failed. The number one reason we heard from our community was that they can not afford more property tax increases. Our median income is roughly \$60,000 a year. Over 32% of our students are considered economically disadvantaged. Yet we are having to ask our community again in May to vote for an increase in their taxes. I wish I could say I was hopeful, but I know all too well the struggles of my community because I, too, have struggled with poverty.

The proposed budget bill will cut \$4.1 million dollars from our county's schools over the next two years. This will certainly mean loss of programs for our students and loss of jobs for our teachers. At a time when we need more teachers to serve the growing number of students, the last thing we need is to be forced to let teachers go because the state has chosen to invest in football stadiums and vouchers instead of fulfilling their Constitutional duty to over 90% of Ohio's students.

I am asking that you implement the Fair School Funding Plan with the updated cost inputs and guarantees into the budget bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Amanda Sue Fontana