

Interested Party Testimony for House Bill 96
House Finance Committee
April 3, 2025

Derek Burtch, High school teacher, nonprofit executive director, parent

Chair Brian Stewart, Vice Chair Michael D. Dovilla, and members of the Finance Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Derek Burtch, and I am an educator in Olentangy Local Schools and a parent of a Columbus City Schools student. I am submitting testimony as an Interested Party to express concern about and adamant opposition to House Bill 96 and urge you to fully support and fund the Fair School Funding Plan in this budget cycle.

I have seen firsthand how essential fair funding is to ensure every child—regardless of their zip code or learning needs—receives a quality education. I've watched teachers in different districts stretch every dollar to provide individualized support, but they shouldn't have to do this under constant financial strain considering that in the district in which I teach we don't want for anything. These stratified educational experiences are undemocratic and cruel to children.

Our community, like many across Ohio, faces unique challenges: rising property taxes, increasing enrollment, and growing needs among students. Without the Fair School Funding Plan, districts like Columbus, where I am a parent, will continue to depend heavily on local levies that often fail—leaving kids behind. In fact, half of Ohio's school levies failed this past cycle. Communities with fewer resources are being asked to do more with less, and that's not sustainable.

This bill impacts more than just budget numbers. It affects children who need intervention specialists, reading support, mental health services, and safe classrooms. It strips schools of the funding to create safe places that center belonging and dignity. The state is constitutionally obligated to provide every child with a high-quality education. Relying on outdated 2022 costs—like in the current budget proposal—would be unthinkable in any household budget. Why should it be acceptable for our schools?

I urge you to consider the real impact this legislation will have on families, educators, and most importantly, students across Ohio. Please commit to completing and fully funding the Fair School Funding Plan in this budget. Every student in Ohio deserves a fair shot—regardless of where they live.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Derek Burtch
Teacher in Olentangy Local Schools
Parent of Columbus City Schools student