



April 3, 2025
House Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony on HB 96
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Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96, Ohio's next biennial budget.

Ohio Federation of Teachers represents teachers and school support staff, higher education faculty and staff, librarians and library workers, and social work professionals. I will briefly touch on parts of the budget that impact our members and the important work that they do in Ohio communities. Please see my House Education Committee testimony for more detailed comments on K-12 school funding and policy.

School Funding and Private School Vouchers

We are grateful for the bipartisan effort in the last two budget cycles that created the Fair School Funding Plan framework and began phasing in funding for that framework. There are few issues that bring Republican, Democratic, and Independent voters together as much as our shared desire for quality local public schools in our communities.

We are also grateful for Governor DeWine's focus on education and his inclusion of the Fair School Funding Plan in his budget proposal. Unfortunately, the Governor's budget uses outdated cost inputs in the funding formula, which understate the current cost of educating students. At the same time, the proposal uses updated property and income tax assessments, which determine a community's ability to fund schools locally. The result of this mismatched data is that the local share ends up increasing while the state share decreases. Rather than getting the increased funding they need, Ohio's public school districts will see a \$103 million cut over the two years of this budget and the share of school funding covered by the state will drop from 43.3% to 32.2% in just three years.

This school year, we are spending one billion dollars on private school vouchers, and this budget proposal expects that amount to climb by another \$177 million. Yet, public schools are being asked to do more with less while still educating 90% of Ohio's children.

Public school funding cuts, due to voucher expansion, hurt all school districts in Ohio, yet not all school districts have private school options nearby that would allow families to take advantage of vouchers. This is especially true for Ohio's rural communities, where the population density doesn't support competing education systems.

The answer to this disparity is not to expand public funding to non-chartered, non-public schools. These schools, sparsely regulated in regards to student safety and academics, are less equipped to educate and elevate students than public schools or even chartered non-public schools. Rural students deserve better than a second tier school system.

If private school vouchers are in place, we think it is common sense to require private schools to meet the same academic accountability and fiscal transparency requirements that are required of local public schools.

We appreciate the Governor's continued commitment to wellness programs in schools, which have provided essential health and mental health support to families who need it most, and to Career Tech Education, which is crucial for the future of our state. We are also highly supportive of Governor DeWine's initiatives around literacy and appreciate that he continues to keep a focus on ensuring that all teachers have the proper professional development and supports for implementing the Science of Reading.

Higher Education

The State Share of Instruction (SSI) increased by 0.1% in FY 2026 and remained stable in FY 2027. SSI is a crucial funding source for community colleges, yet this funding level does not keep pace with inflation. We recommend that state funding for instruction rise by an amount that aligns with inflation for FY 2026 and FY 2027.

The executive budget proposes a \$23.3 million (11.8%) increase for fiscal year 2026 and a \$13.2 million (6.0%) decrease for fiscal year 2027 in need-based student financial aid through the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) Program. According to the National Association of State Student Aid Programs, Ohio ranks nearly last in the Midwest regarding student aid. We support increasing the amount of aid received through OCOG and we also recommend that OCOG become a "first dollar" scholarship, given the uncertainty of federal funding.

Ohio must lower the cost of higher education and promote the important role of technical education and community colleges in preparing Ohio's workforce for the future.

Public Libraries

Public libraries are cornerstones of our community that provide an ever-growing range of public services: connecting community members with social services and career resources; helping students with homework; providing free notary services and genealogical research; hosting storytime and other activities for young children; and so much more. Public libraries, along with public schools, are essential to the goal of providing equality of opportunity to all Ohioans.

We strongly support Governor DeWine's proposed increase to Ohio's Public Library Fund (from the current 1.7% of the state's General Revenue Fund to 1.75% in FY26 and FY27) and we urge you to keep it in the budget.

Children's Services

Ohio counties are responsible for paying the placement costs of youth in their custody, and these costs have risen due to limited placement options and other systemic challenges. Costs are rising, in part due to the limitations of the federal Title IV-E reimbursements for foster care. Only 48% of Ohio foster youth qualify for Title IV-E reimbursement, leaving counties to fully fund the remaining 52% of foster youth. When counties are forced to pay above federally set ceiling rates, those costs are ineligible for IV-E funds, resulting in an annual \$7 million loss. Additionally, the Family First Prevention Services Act disqualified certain placements from IV-E funding, leading to at least \$15M in lost reimbursements since 2021.

The escalating costs require the state to do all it can to keep children safe and make sure that staff caseloads are manageable. We support the investments in the Governor's budget, including increasing the State Child Protection Allocation and new funding for children's wellness campuses, which will help support children in crisis.

We urge the House to maintain the proposed investments in children's services outlined in the Governor's budget so that county children's services agencies can tackle the rising placement costs and provide the local match necessary to secure and optimize federal funding.

This concludes my testimony. I welcome any questions you may have.