

**Finance Committee  
Ohio House of Representatives  
Substitute House Bill 96**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Finance Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute HB 96.

My name is Kristy Meyer. I am a proud product of Westerville City Schools. My husband and I are raising two kids who also attend Westerville City Schools. I also am currently serving as the Westerville City School Board President, a privilege I do not take lightly. I, we, love the Westerville City Schools District.

As a mom, a taxpayer, and a Board Member of the WCSD, I provide this testimony today to urge you to:

- Remove the requirement that the county should reduce our tax rates based on fund balances;
- Fully fund the Fair School Formula plan;
- Update the cost inputs to 2025 for FY 2026 & 2027;
- Keep the state share at FY 2025 percentages for FY 26 & 27
- Update the funding for Special Education in line with the completed studies;
- No longer require our school district to administer services to students in non-public schools; and,
- No longer require school districts to transport children to non-public schools.

When my husband and I were expecting our first child, we knew we wanted our kids to attend public schools—just as he did in Lakewood Local and I did, as mentioned, in Westerville City Schools. Like nearly 90% of Ohio families, we chose public education. Yet, despite this overwhelming choice, Ohio's public school funding remains inequitable and inadequate.

Westerville City Schools receives just about \$3,000 per student in state foundation funding—the same amount as in 2021—while inflation has risen nearly 22% since then. Meanwhile, non-public school students receive over \$6,000 or \$8,000, plus additional publicly funded services. This funding gap unfairly penalizes families who choose public education and limits resources for the majority of Ohio's students.

Since 2021, Westerville City Schools has been underfunded by \$29.1 million with the state's funding formula. Over the years, reductions in state support for public schools have forced districts to rely more on local taxpayers through levies. If the state would fully fund the Fair School Formula and update the cost inputs, as well as stop sending more than twice the amount of our taxpayer dollars to families choosing private schooling, our Schools would be better funded and School Districts would not have to ask for such big levies.

Some claim it is cheaper to educate students in non-public schools, but that is simply false. For example, The Wellington Academy in Columbus tuition starts at \$22,500 and rises to roughly

\$33,000 per student per year. Furthermore, public school districts are legally required to transport non-public school students and provide special education services at non-public schools, which benefits those going to private schools, but further drains public school resources that could otherwise benefit the students within the district

The impact of this funding disparity also impacts our most vulnerable, our special needs students. Westerville City Schools serves 14,697 students, 16% of whom have special needs. Special education classrooms require smaller class sizes—typically eight students per teacher, compared to 25-30 in general education—along with additional instructional aides; nursing services; speech, occupational and physical therapy; and specialized equipment such as adaptive tools and changing tables. These are real costs that the state must account for when funding public education.

I know that our Treasurer and CFO, Nicole Marshall, has provided testimony speaking to the harm of requiring the county to reduce our tax rates based on fund balances without taking into account plans made by locally elected officials. I would like to underscore her concern. I do all our finances in our house and I also run my own business, as the person that handles all the finances in our house, I follow the advice of financial planners that recommend families and businesses save for three to six months' worth of expenses for emergency purposes. In addition, through obtaining my business degree many years ago, I learned that it would be fiscally irresponsible to not save three to six months of expenses for an economic downturn. The Westerville City School District is being fiscally responsible by ensuring we can maintain programming and absorb costs to repair things like HVACs, walk-in coolers, and adding additional security measures to protect the students of the District and staff. I, therefore, respectfully request this Committee remove this language from the substitute HB 96.

I further respectfully request the Committee to fully fund the Fair School Funding Formula with updated FY 25 cost inputs for FY 2026 and 2027 and special needs costs so our district could better provide the necessary support for all students. Additionally, I request you eliminate the requirement for public schools to subsidize non-public education to allow districts to focus resources where they are needed most—on the students they are responsible for educating.

To be clear, I am not saying parents should not have a choice in their children's education. However, the majority of Ohio families choose public education, and they should not be penalized for doing so. Westerville City Schools stretches every dollar to provide high-quality, student-centered learning opportunities that prepare children for the workforce and productive citizenship. Yet, the district is being asked to do more with substantially less in this sub bill.

Public education is the backbone of a strong, healthy community and state. The Fair School Funding Formula, a bipartisan, research-backed plan, must be fully funded and implemented now with updated cost inputs, without tying hands of school districts with carry-over expenditures exceeding 25% of the previous fiscal years' general fund expenditures. I urge policymakers to take immediate action to ensure that Ohio's public schools receive the resources they need to serve all students equitably and effectively.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.