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Sponsor Testimony of Representative Mike Dovilla
Regarding Zero Based Budgeting (House Bill 645)
Before the House Committee on Finance
Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Chairman Stewart, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 645.

House Bill 645 takes a straightforward but important step toward strengthening fiscal discipline in Ohio's state government by requiring the use of zero-based budgeting in the development of the state budget every ten years.

Under traditional budgeting practices, government agencies often build their requests on the prior budget, making incremental adjustments each cycle. Over time, this approach can allow programs, line items, and administrative activities to continue indefinitely without a thorough reevaluation of their necessity or effectiveness. That process can make it difficult for policymakers and the public to determine whether taxpayer dollars are truly being spent in the most efficient and responsible manner.

Zero-based budgeting takes a different approach by requiring agencies to justify their spending from the ground up. Instead of assuming the previous year's funding levels should continue, every program and expenditure must be justified starting from a baseline of zero.

This process encourages a more disciplined and transparent approach to budgeting. It forces agencies to examine their programs closely, evaluate outcomes, and clearly explain why each expenditure is necessary to fulfill the responsibilities entrusted to them.

For the General Assembly, this approach strengthens our ability to provide meaningful oversight of state spending. Members of this body, as part of the first branch of government and the chamber where appropriations bills are initiated, have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that the resources entrusted to government by Ohio taxpayers are being used wisely. Requiring a periodic zero-based review will help ensure that we are not simply carrying forward legacy spending decisions without careful scrutiny.

The legislation also helps address concerns many Ohioans have about the size and complexity of government. Over time, the administrative state can grow through layers of programs, regulations, and bureaucratic structures that are difficult to unwind once established. By regularly requiring agencies to rebuild their budgets from zero, this bill provides a

mechanism to evaluate whether programs are still necessary, effective, and aligned with the priorities of the people we serve.

Importantly, House Bill 645 does not impose this process every year or even every biennium. Instead, it establishes a ten-year cycle beginning with the General Assembly convening in 2027. This timeline strikes a balance between meaningful fiscal review and administrative practicality, allowing agencies and policymakers the opportunity to reassess spending without creating unnecessary disruption in the annual budgeting process.

Zero-based budgeting has been used by governments and organizations as a tool to combat wasteful spending, increase transparency, and focus resources on the most important priorities. Implementing it strategically in Ohio's budgeting process provides a structured opportunity to ensure that state government remains efficient, accountable, and focused on delivering results for Ohioans.

House Bill 645 does not predetermine outcomes or mandate specific spending reductions. Rather, it establishes a framework that encourages thoughtful evaluation, responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, and greater transparency in how public funds are allocated.

Ultimately, the purpose of this legislation is simple: to ensure that every dollar spent by the state can be clearly justified to the citizens who provided it.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 645. I would be happy at this time to address any questions you may have.