

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 10/14/2025

Name: Phillip J. Oko

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Garfield Heights City School District

Position/Title: Treasurer/CFO

Address: 5640 Briarcliff Drive

City: Garfield Heights State: OH Zip: 44125

Best Contact Telephone: 216-475-8100 Email: poko@ghbulldogs.org

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 335

Specific Issue: Inside Millage Growth

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? Written

Please provide a brief statement on your position: Garfield Hts CSD is opposed to HB 335 as written as it reduces funding to curb growth in inflationary expenditures, and continues the shift of the tax burden onto local taxpayers. See attached testimony.

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*



**House Ways and Means  
House Bill 335  
October 15, 2025**

**Garfield Heights City School District, Cuyahoga County  
Phillip J. Oko, Treasurer/CFO**

**Dr. Richard D. Reynolds**  
Superintendent of Schools

Chair Roemer, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 335. My name is Phillip J. Oko, and I serve as the Treasurer/CFO of Garfield Heights CSD in Cuyahoga County.

**Phillip J. Oko, M.B.A.**  
Treasurer/CFO

First, I want to acknowledge the real concern that rising property taxes present for our communities. Like you, I believe we need responsible, balanced solutions that provide relief to taxpayers without destabilizing schools.

**Board of Education**

**Dr. Millette King, L.S.W., C-CHW.**  
President

HB 335 as currently drafted limits revenue growth for inside millage, which in our district means:

**Heather Morrison, M.B.A.**  
Vice President

- A reduced ability to keep pace with inflation in utilities, maintenance, supplies, and staffing
- Potential elimination or rollback of programs like intervention, arts, extracurriculars, advanced courses, and student support
- Staffing reductions or hiring constraints
- Frequent levy campaigns that strain homeowners
- Instability in multi-year planning, capital projects, and contracting

**Thandeka Cox, M. Ed.**

**Nichelle N. Daniels**

**Ashley M. Thomas, M. Ed.**

In our district, we serve 2,600 students daily. Under HB 335, the loss of these critical funding dollars will lead to upwards of 10 staff positions eliminated, support programs and academic elective course elimination, and further negative impacts to our already poor, underserved and underfunded District as a whole. These would be direct, painful impacts on the students and families we serve.



Garfield Heights already has a high property tax rate (second in the state of Ohio), due to unique city charters and county taxes, whereas our schools operate on the lower end of property tax burden. Only 52% of total property taxes in our District fund the schools when the state average runs between 60-70%. Garfield Heights City Schools has not asked for new operating levy dollars in 13 years, as the Board understands the immense burden on our taxpayers. there is very little "headroom" to absorb additional burden, as HB 335 would impose on our community. The elimination of inside millage effectively puts districts like ours between a rock and a hard place: either we shift more onto local taxpayers or cut deeply.

**Board of Education Offices**  
5640 Briarcliff Drive  
Garfield Heights, Ohio 44125

Telephone: 216.475.8100  
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Our District urges you to consider reforms that:

- Focus relief on those truly in need (seniors, lower-income households) rather than across-the-board cuts
- Maintain local flexibility so districts can respond to inflation and cost pressures
- Phase in changes gradually, allowing districts to adjust
- Guarantee replacement revenue or increased state support to offset lost inside millage
- Preserve tools like emergency or substitute levies, subject to safeguards

**Dr. Richard D. Reynolds**  
Superintendent of Schools

**Phillip J. Oko, M.B.A.**  
Treasurer/CFO

HB 335, as currently drafted, risks undermining our ability to focus on what matters most: preparing students for success in literacy, math, workforce readiness, and beyond. For Garfield Heights and communities like ours, the costs are not theoretical — they are immediate and real.

Board of Education

**Dr. Millette King, L.S.W., C-CHW.**  
President

**Heather Morrison, M.B.A.**  
Vice President

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Phillip J. Oko, Treasurer/CFO  
Garfield Heights City School District

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