

I am Cathy Carson, a 30-year resident of Powell and a taxpayer/former intervention aide in the Olentangy Local School District. I am reaching out to express my deep concern about the current state of public-school funding in our community and across Ohio. Many of my family and friends are parents, teachers, students and staff in the Olentangy and other Ohio districts. I am deeply concerned about extraordinary and damaging budget cuts proposed (please don't characterize this budget as an increase – we citizens know it represents cuts).

I have seen firsthand how insufficient funding affects our classrooms, teachers, and students. Over the last two school years, the State's share of the base cost per pupil has fallen by around \$561 per pupil. It will drop by an additional \$686 per Olentangy student, hitting the state minimum share of \$800 per pupil. And now we see that not only the state budget but the federal dismantling of the Department of Education is designed to pull funds from public schools and direct them to "choice" or "charter" schools, which are not subject to the same standards and evaluation (nor financial rules) as our public schools.

I have listened closely to school board meetings explaining the funding process and the importance of carryover funds. In Olentangy, the influx of new residents has created an urgent need to build new schools; **a district cannot efficiently plan such long-term projects nor respond to emergencies without carryover funds!** Ohio legislature's attempt to limit a district's operating carry-over cash balance to only 30% will cost Olentangy Schools \$90-\$100 million just in the 2025-26 school year. This is property tax revenue already committed to districts at the behest of voters – not meant to be "clawed back" by legislature. This loss of property tax revenue will have a drastically negative impact on our district—potentially sending Olentangy into fiscal emergency and losing control to non-district legislature commissions, which will likely be the case across the state – this is UNPRECEDENTED and I cannot help but see this as an attack on our public schools, while you and the federal government intend to continue to increase funding for "choice" or "community" schools – which do not exist in many parts of Ohio – again, unconstitutional and unfair funding. Specifically, I ask this committee:

- Do not decrease the state's share of our funding in the next Ohio Biennium Budget.
- Use **current data** to determine the actual cost to educate, **not data from 2022**.
- Increase the minimum state share of the base cost from 10% to 20%.
- Fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan with the changes above.
- Remove the provision restricting school cash balances to 30% or 90 days.

Olentangy Schools—and public schools across Ohio—need your leadership and commitment. My sister has been a dedicated teacher at a small rural school in Richland County for over 32 years – believe me, she will NEVER be compensated for the time, commitment and care she has given generations of students there (I have seen grownups return to her classroom in gratitude for her impact in their lives). All Ohio students – your children too -- deserve access to a well-funded, high-quality education that prepares them for success. For 2 years I spent much time in schools, going from classroom to classroom assisting children with special needs – and I was privileged to watch extraordinarily talented, committed and skilled teachers guide pupils in everything from math, science, language, history, reading and writing, to conflict resolution, teamwork and kindness. They deserve your support – not your derision. PLEASE reconsider this budget. Thank you.