

**Testimony for House Bill 96**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**[May 7, 2025]**

**Natalie Hastings, parent of Forest Hills School District Students**

Chair Andrew Brenner, Vice Chair Bill Blessing, Ranking Member Catherine Ingram, and members of the Education Committee of the Ohio Senate:

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today. My name is Natalie Hastings, and I am a parent of two students at Turpin High School in the Forest Hills School District. I'm also an advocate for public education.

I'm writing today with concerns about the funding allocated for Forest Hills and all public school districts in the current version of the biennial budget for 2025-26 and 2026-27, which would place more burden on our local community. Our local taxpayers fund about 73% of the cost for educating students via property taxes.

**I'm asking you to fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan, to eliminate the cap on savings and to protect the guarantee funding.**

The most recent property valuation for Forest Hills homes placed a larger burden on our local taxpayers, but they don't reap any benefits. Our district's proposed increase in the budget is less than 1 percent for each upcoming year. The proposed 30% cap on savings would also punish our local taxpayers who voted to fund the schools with a 2023 levy. We would stand to lose millions of dollars responsibly saved for future years due to the uncertainty of how our schools are funded.

Our schools are among the top in the county; our high schools are among the top in the state and nation. About 85% of our school districts' expenses go toward teaching our students.

What will we have to cut without these funds? Our award-winning fine arts programs? Services for disabled students? Bussing?

And how will we plan for the future with an uncertain mechanism for funding our schools?

My son, CJ, graduates in a few weeks from Turpin High School. He is headed to the University of Cincinnati - Conservatory of Music on a merit scholarship, where he will study jazz performance on the bass and double bass. His achievements are in large part a reflection of the excellent

education he received in Forest Hills. I want those same opportunities for our kids, in Forest Hills and throughout Ohio.

CJ also participated in theatre all four years. That's where he found confidence, received mentorship and made lifelong friendships. I want that for all kids.

CJ spent a week in Spain practicing his Spanish fluency last year with teachers and classmates. Yes, we paid for the trip itself, but we did not pay for the hundreds of hours of excellent education in the Spanish language over the past five years (other than via our property taxes). I want all kids to have the chance to learn a foreign language to expand their worlds.

My other son, Graham, is in 9th grade. He's flourished in a graphic arts program, discovering a skill he didn't know he possessed. I want all kids to discover their strengths.

I can't wait to see what else Graham will take on in his next three years of high school; I've seen the direct impact a quality high school education has on a child's future potential as a contributing citizen of our state. I want that for all kids.

Esteemed committee members, please ensure that all kids can have experiences like the ones my kids have enjoyed. Fully fund the public education that they need and deserve.

Please fully phase in the fair funding plan, eliminate the savings cap, and protect guarantee funding for Forest Hills and other districts that rely on that funding.

Thank you,

Natalie Hastings