

Testimony for House Bill 96
Senate Education Committee

May 7, 2025

Ruth Hardy, constituent in District 8

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 submit my testimony today. My name is Ruth Hardy. I'm a resident in the Forest Hills School District, voter, and an active volunteer.

I believe it is my obligation, as a citizen and taxpayer, to contribute toward public education that is adequate to prepare all students for a productive civic life and success in the workplace. I am happy to do so because my school district, the Forest Hill School District, is a model of excellence, and the pride of our community. But the reluctance of the Ohio Gen. assembly to adequately fund Ohio schools is hugely concerning to me. To be fully funded based on statistics from the Fair School Funding Plan from 2021, schools would need \$666 million. The proposed budget only gives them about \$226 million. That's even less state money going into our schools than back when the state share was first deemed unconstitutional .

I am asking for the following HB 96 budget proposals to be changed:

1. The Fair School Funding Plan must be fully funded and implemented.
2. The "Guarantee" (guaranteed funding levels) must be protected. Please update the base costs inputs for in the fiscal funding plan from 2022 levels. Under this budget, FHSD would actually receive less than 2022 levels. Over the next two years, FHSD would lose approximately \$850,000.
3. The State Share Minimum must be increased to at least 20% for districts like FHD to ensure the public education remains a shared state and local responsibility.
4. The cap on cash balances must be removed. This provision would limit a district's ability to properly execute long-term financial plans, and punish fiscal prudence.

Under this proposed budget, my school district, FHSD, is being punished for high performance, low per-pupil expenses, efficient use of funding, and achieving excellent outcomes.

The students are being punished - Their instructional services & equipment, extra-curriculars, counseling & mental health support and learning labs will be diminished while their class sizes will increase.

The teachers and administration are being punished - They will face heavier student loads, health insurance benefit reductions, and forego scheduled salary raises necessary to keep up with inflation.

The community is being punished – We will face more property tax levies and fewer students will achieve the high standards necessary to prepare themselves for a productive civic life and success in the workplace. We know producing capable students is key to Ohio's economy, yet we will be denying them the essential resources they need to achieve what employers are so desperately looking for.

Why is this happening? While transparency from our state leaders is lacking, it is clear the state is cutting support for public schools so they can finance an expanded voucher program.

While on the one hand, our school district is being punished for high achievement, meeting state standards, and fiscal responsibility, on the other, taxpayer-funded voucher schools are rewarded for low performance, lack of adherence to state standards, and poor management of funding, including illegal practices such as hundreds of millions of public education dollars being transferred to unaccountable private and predominantly religious schools – despite clear prohibitions against such a diversion of public money in the Ohio Constitution.

The shortfalls in public educational funding in this budget proposal will, of course, require additional property tax levies to make up for funding losses and to keep up with inflation and recurring instructional upgrades. Many of our community's senior citizens and median income families are living on the edge in the face of the constantly escalating costs of living. I'm already having to cut back on taking my medicines. I question the ethics of private religious schools who are raising their tuitions to take advantage of the new funding pool and insisting that all parents apply for those extended vouchers, regardless of their ability to afford tuition.

If these school funding measures are adopted, the result will be the further diminishment of our state's education system, leaving the disadvantaged families who need it most – especially in Ohio's urban and rural communities – with fewer resources and less support to secure a strong future for their children.

Please make the following changes in HB 96, recognizing that the future of Ohio's economy rests on the successful education of ALL our students:

1. Fully phase in The Fair School Funding Plan
2. Eliminate the cap on District savings balances
3. Protect the "Guarantee"
4. Increase the state share minimum.

Thank you for your time and consideration.