

Testimony for House Bill 96
Senate Education Committee
May 6, 2025
Kimberly Olthoff, Hamilton County Resident

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 testify today. My name is Kimberly Olthoff. I am a parent in the Forest Hills School District and volunteer as a public school advocate, helping to keep residents informed on issues our public education is currently facing, as well as how operations, policy, and budgets work (or rather currently don't work) in Ohio.

I am writing to express concern regarding HB96 and the impact it will have on public schools throughout the state. I have grave concerns about Ohio's public schools not being fully funded, and the impact that has on local residents, who shoulder the burden of continued cuts to public education.

I support, and hope you will, too – fully funding our public schools. Right now, our district funds around 74% with local property taxes and levies that the community is asked to fund every few years to keep even basic standards in our schools met.

I am specifically asking for 3 things

1. Eliminate cap on savings
2. Protect the Guarantee for districts like FHSD
3. Fully phase in the Fair School Funding Plan

My husband and I left Texas 4 years ago in part because of the direction public education funding was headed there. We chose Ohio for several reasons, but Forest Hills Schools is where I received a wonderful public education. We are now watching similar circumstances in Ohio, and that is concerning to me that my children will not be able to receive the education they deserve or the individual support they need to succeed if the current proposals are accepted. Our continued presence in Ohio is under consideration for this reason.

My husband and I are both the products of public education, after he left private education that couldn't meet the higher academic needs that could be provided by public education. I am personally a product of Forest Hills Schools. Access to art curriculum and the variety offered ultimately led to my choice to attend UC DAAP. Without access to those programs, I would not be the person I am today. I want my kids to have access to those same opportunities, many of which will be under scrutiny for elimination if we lose millions in funding over the next few years.

Our area has already seen the impact of underfunding public education in the way of financial support for our schools being placed so heavily on the local taxpayer. As I earlier mentioned, FHSD provides around 74% of it's funding with local taxes and levies.

Families like mine who moved here for the schools have been financially impacted in several ways, between a 20% increase in the cost of living since 2020, property assessments with skyrocketing home values increasing taxes significantly for residents, and additional levies that our schools desperately need to keep running. Those combined changes are actively pricing residents out of their homes. And our own residents' budgets, like school budgets, can't be trimmed further without significant impact. To quote our superintendent Larry Hook "you can't just cut your way to fiscal health".

The impact of those continued cuts, and not following the commitment that was communicated to taxpayers on fair school funding, will have long lasting effects on not just our students, but our communities, and ultimately, Ohio's future economy.

For these reasons I am asking you to consider my testimony and vote to fund the Fair School Funding Plan that was promised to the taxpayers. The future of Ohio and its residents depends on your commitment to fully funding our public schools.

I appreciate your time and reading my testimony. I ask you to remember the impact these proposed cuts will have on our communities and our future, and vote to fully fund public education.

Kind Regards,
Kimberly Olthoff