

Senate Education Committee
Testimony on House Bill 96
Submitted by: Lauren MarchazaFai
May 13, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96. My name is Lauren Marchaza, and I serve on the Board of Education for the Mentor Exempted Village School District in Lake County. I am also a graduate of Mentor Public Schools, and a parent of two children in the district.

I write to express my strong support for the full implementation and funding of the Fair School Funding Plan (FSFP) and to urge the legislature to protect local financial control over Ohio's public school districts.

The Ohio Constitution guarantees a "thorough and efficient system of common schools" for all children in the state. This constitutional mandate has been affirmed repeatedly by the Ohio Supreme Court, which found that the state's overreliance on local property taxes creates disparities in educational opportunities. As nearly 90% of Ohio's children attend public schools, it is imperative that the state budget reflects this reality through adequate and equitable funding.

The Fair School Funding Plan was created through a bipartisan effort, led by former Representatives Robert Cupp and John Patterson, with input from educators, superintendents, treasurers, and policy experts across the state. It is a transparent, student-centered formula based on the actual cost of educating each student—one that balances state and local responsibility. Since its enactment, the FSFP has brought stability and fairness to Ohio's public school finance system. It is not a static formula, but a living one that must evolve with changing economic and educational needs.

Unfortunately, House Bill 96 and the proposed FY 2026–2027 budget threaten the integrity of this progress. By underfunding the state's share of education costs and reverting to non-transparent budgeting practices, we risk undoing years of thoughtful, research-based work. For the Mentor Exempted Village School District specifically, this underfunding would result in a loss of \$560,284 over the biennium compared to what would be provided under a fully funded FSFP.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about the proposal to cap district cash reserves at 30% of the prior year's expenditures and to withhold voter-approved levy revenue for exceeding that threshold. This is an unprecedented intrusion into local control. Responsible cash management, including reserves above 30%, is a crucial tool for districts to manage uncertainty, plan for capital improvements, offset inflation, and avoid repeated levy campaigns. For Mentor, this cap would lead to an estimated revenue loss of \$11.1 million in FY26 alone.

Capping reserves and underfunding the FSFP will force districts to return to the ballot more frequently, increasing the burden on local taxpayers and creating instability in educational programming. In addition, reducing funding guarantees undermines predictability and planning, and could result in harmful cuts to staff, programs, and services that students rely on.

We respectfully urge this Committee and the General Assembly to:

- Fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan using up-to-date, research-based inputs;
- Reject any reductions to funding guarantees, which provide a critical safety net for many districts;
- Eliminate any proposal to cap local cash reserves or restrict access to locally approved levies; and
- Reaffirm your commitment to local control and long-term financial stability for school districts across the state.

We also call upon other school districts, educational associations, and community stakeholders to stand with us in supporting a fair, adequate, and locally accountable school funding system that benefits all Ohio students.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We are committed to working with you to ensure that every child in Ohio has access to a high-quality education, supported by a fair and functional funding system.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Marchaza
7816 Oakridge Drive
Concord Township, OH 44060