

HB 96 WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 05/07/2025

Name: Students At Belmont High School, Dayton Public Schools

Are you representing: Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Dayton Public Schools

Position/Title: Students in Mrs. Martcheva's class

Address: 2615 Wayne Ave, Dayton, OH 45420

Best Contact Telephone: 937-716-3939

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes

Business before the committee – Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): House Bill 96

Specific Issue: School Transportation Funding

Are you testifying as a: Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? Each testimony is 1-2 minutes. There are 9 testimonies related to school funding.

Please provide a brief statement on your position: The following testimonies advocate for more funding to be allocated in the HB96 budget to school resources, including transportation, OEC, lunches, ESL programming, athletics, and mental health services.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

David Atkinson – School Funding, OEC

Good Morning ladies and gentlemen, my name is David Atkinson, a junior from Belmont High School - A Dayton Public School. Due to proposed funding cuts to education, school districts in Ohio and nationally are losing funding. These proposed cuts will disproportionately affect children with disabilities, behavioral issues, and students in advanced placement. Federal spending for these programs made up less than 1% of the federal budget in 2024. The resources and support these children need to develop into functioning members of society are being threatened with no benefit.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are already instances where deaf and blind children in this country are being denied an education due to these funding cuts. Without this funding, things as simple as a child with sight issues sitting closer to the board could be denied to children, if they are allowed to attend school at all, as many children without this funding will be denied any form of education. Not only will these cuts leave our disabled children behind, but they will also affect our brightest minds, as funding for exceptional student resources is also being cut.

Ohio is a home of innovation, and I fear for our future when we do not value taking care of our future leaders within our school system and instead suppress them. The debt this will cause for our future generations, will be far more costly than what it will take to educate our children. These cuts affect students with behavioral issues within our school system who require higher support as well. These students are not inherently bad. They are just literal children, many of whom are neglected at home and have school as their only refuge where they can receive the support they need to grow into functional adults. They need mentors, someone to step in and take care of them. At Dayton Public Schools we have systems in place that do this. These systems have existed as common sense for decades. These are our most vulnerable groups, as in this country we do not afford minors the same rights as we do adults, and because of this, it becomes increasingly difficult for these children to advocate for themselves. If we truly want to protect our children, as this government claims to want to do, we must be their advocates.

Lawmakers, we must safeguard their rights; including their right to education, as they cannot properly wield these rights without being educated on how to do so. These cuts are unjustifiable, they save us what is equivalent to a rounding error in the federal budget and directly go against our government's duty to protect its citizens. We should not pass a degenerate legislature that threatens to regress all that we have worked decades for. If this is allowed to happen, if we willfully put our most vulnerable groups at risk, we will not be remembered as being on the right side of history, and it will forever be a stain on this state's reputation. The purpose of government, of the state, is to protect and provide for its citizens and represent its constituents. The actions being taken right now to defund public education undermine the very principles that allow the state to exist. We are not asking for a lot, we are asking for the bare minimum.

Thank you for your time and attention in the critical matter.

Skyler Bowles; School Funding - Breakfast/lunch

Good morning, respected members of the body, administrators, and everyone here today.

My name is Skyler Bowles, I am an 8th grader from Belmont Middle School - A Dayton Public School. I'm here to speak about a critical issue that directly affects the health, well-being, and academic success of our students—the potential budget cuts to our school breakfast and lunch services due to a lack of school funding. According to the Dayton Daily News “Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal.”

Lawmakers please know that for many students, the meals provided at school are their most reliable source of nutrition that they have. Breakfast and lunch are not just about feeding their bodies - they're about setting them up for success in the classroom. Everyone knows a well-nourished student is better able to focus, engage, and perform academically. And without these meals, many students would go without the energy they need to learn, making it more difficult to succeed in school.

Unfortunately, if funding continues to be reduced, we risk cutting these vital meal programs. Dayton Public Schools offer breakfast and lunch service free of charge because most of our students are socio disadvantaged. As you can imagine, this would have devastating consequences for students who rely on school meals as their primary source of nutrition. Many of these students will go without food - without school-provided meals, they would face hunger and all the associated challenges that come with it—difficulty concentrating, increased absenteeism, and even negative impacts on their overall health.

Ladies and gentlemen, school breakfast and lunch programs are not just an expense; they are an investment in our children's future. So cutting these services will disproportionately impact our most vulnerable students, and it will undermine the academic progress and well-being of our entire Dayton community.

I urge you to prioritize funding for these essential programs. No child should have to worry about where their next meal is coming from. Lawmakers, by supporting school breakfast and lunch services, we are ensuring that all students have the foundation they need to succeed, both in school and in life.

Thank you.

Ivan Baraka; School funding - ESL

Good morning, respected members of the House, senate, school administrators, and everyone here today.

My name is Ivan Baraka, I'm an 8th grader from Belmont Middle School - At Dayton Public Schools. I'm here to speak on behalf of our English as a Second Language (ESL) students, who are among the most vulnerable in our school system. The lack of funding for our schools is threatening essential programs like ESL, and I believe this issue cannot be ignored. Dayton public schools have over 1,700 students in ESL programs which is about 13% of our overall student population. According to the Dayton Daily News "Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal."

Lawmakers, please understand that our ESL programs are crucial for helping non-native English speakers succeed in school and beyond. These students come from diverse backgrounds and often face additional challenges in learning, not only academically but also in adapting to a new culture. So without proper language support, these students are at a significant disadvantage, struggling to keep up with their peers and will often stop coming to school.

Our ESL teachers at Dayton Public Schools provide the specialized instruction these students need to develop their language skills and thrive in the classroom. However, if funding cuts continue as proposed, we risk reducing the number of ESL teachers, lowering the quality of instruction, and ultimately failing to meet the needs of our growing ESL student population. This would not only hinder their academic progress but could also impact their emotional well-being and sense of belonging in the school community.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are at a crossroads where the lack of funding could lead to overcrowded ESL classrooms, reduced resources, and fewer opportunities for language support. So this is not just about providing language instruction—this is about ensuring that every student has a fair chance to succeed, regardless of their background. Removing the ESL program could isolate large districts, making them vulnerable due to a lack of understanding of English the base language in the U.S. If America is truly the melting pot - where everyone has the chance to be successful - and live the American Dream - then please show me - by funding our schools and these critical programs.

I urge you to prioritize funding for ESL programs. Our students deserve the resources they need to succeed academically, and we must ensure they are not left behind because of these proposed budget cuts.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Grayson Criswell; School Funding - Extended Programs

Good morning, esteemed members of the House, Senate, Superintendent Lawrence and all who have gathered here today. My name is Grayson Criswell, a freshman from Belmont High School - A Dayton Public School.

Today, I stand before you to address a critical issue that threatens the future of our students - Esteemed members I would like to address the lack of school funding and how it could create deep cuts to our extended programs such as Advanced Placement (AP), College Credit Plus (CCP), and Career and Technical Education (CTE). According to the Dayton Daily News "Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal."

Esteemed members - Please understand that these programs are not just supplemental opportunities - they are lifelines for many students in our district. Allow me to explain, AP courses challenge students to excel academically, prepare them for college, and open doors to scholarships and advanced degrees. CCP provides high school students with the opportunity to earn college credit, easing the financial burden of higher education and giving them a head start on their academic careers. And CTE equips students with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce, offering them a path to stable, well-paying jobs straight out of high school.

However, without adequate funding, these programs will face deep cuts, cause staffing shortages, and limited access to vital resources. AP classes could be eliminated due to lack of qualified teachers, CCP opportunities might dwindle as partnerships with local colleges would be strained, and CTE programs could become obsolete - if we can't invest in the equipment and training needed for these specialized fields.

Esteemed members - For many of our students, these programs are their chance to rise above circumstances, to take their futures into their own hands, and to achieve success they might not otherwise have had. When funding for these programs is cut, we are directly undermining our students' potential.

We are here today to tell you that we cannot afford to let that happen! I urge you to prioritize funding for our district to allow AP, CCP, and CTE programs to continue. So that every student has the opportunity to succeed, whether that path leads to college, a career, or beyond - we must be given that chance.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Rylie Estes; School Funding - Workforce Reduction

Good morning, respected members of the House, Senate, school administrators, and all those gathered here today to support school funding efforts. My name is Rylie Estes, I'm a junior at Belmont High School - A Dayton Public School.

Ladies and gentlemen, I stand before you to speak on a critical issue that affects not only our students but the dedicated educators who serve them. According to the Dayton Daily News "Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal." Where do you propose these cuts will go first?

We have all seen in recent years schools become more and more overcrowded, with larger class sizes and fewer resources. Unfortunately, if funding continues to decrease, we are at risk of losing even more teachers. A reduction in the teacher workforce is not just a statistic to be taken lightly as it directly impacts the quality of education our students will receive.

Ladies and gentlemen, our teachers are the heart of any school. They shape minds, inspire futures, and often serve as mentors and counselors for students. However, with overcrowded classrooms, larger student-to-teacher ratios, and reduced budgets, teachers are stretched thin. If we don't invest in our educators, they won't be able to provide the personalized attention and support our students desperately need.

When teacher positions are cut because of lack of funding, the remaining staff members are expected to take on even more responsibilities, further contributing to burnout and the loss of passion and effectiveness in the classroom. Ladies and gentlemen, It creates a vicious cycle: fewer teachers, more students, and less support for those who need it most.

Please understand our students deserve better - our teachers deserve better! The future of our education system depends on ensuring that we have enough qualified educators in every classroom, especially in schools like ours that are already struggling with overcrowding.

I urge you to prioritize funding for our schools, so we can keep our classrooms staffed, our students engaged, and our teachers supported.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Liam Greaney; School funding - Transportation

Good respected members of the body, administrators, and everyone present today.

My name is Laim Greaney, a junior from Belmont High School - A Dayton Public School. I come before you to discuss a serious issue that affects not only our students but also our entire community—the lack of funding for schools that can lead to loss of school transportation for our students. According to the Dayton Daily News “Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal.”

As you may know Dayton Public Schools have been using our cities RTA bussing for a number of years. In the past month one of our High School students was shot and killed on the way to the bus hub. This has caused an outcry from regular citizens, concerned parents, lawmakers and RTA officials. Their proposal is to end the RTA bus passes for our students, further complicating an already tenuous situation.

Ladies and gentlemen, school transportation is essential for ensuring that all students have access to education, no matter where they live. For many families, the bus is the only way their children can safely and reliably get to school. Yet, due to ongoing budget cuts, we're facing the very real threat of reductions in city bussing, fewer yellow buses available, and even longer travel times for students. So when you're arguing about the lack of attendance - which is part of our district's state report card - look no further than the issue of bussing and the lack of resources to effectively transport our students safely and efficiently.

Lawmakers, when transportation is cut, the impact is immediate and far-reaching. Students may be forced to walk long distances, sometimes through unsafe areas, to get to school. Furthermore, when families can't rely on transportation, it becomes more difficult for them to attend school consistently. The result? Lower attendance rates, disruptions to learning, and students falling behind. These are things that Dayton Public Schools can not afford.

Ladies and gentlemen, transportation is not just a logistical issue - it's a fundamental part of our students' ability to learn and succeed. When we fail to invest in transportation, we are denying our children equal access to education and putting them at a disadvantage.

I urge you to prioritize funding for school transportation. Our students deserve the ability to get to school safely, on time, and ready to learn. Lawmakers, let's make sure they have that opportunity - and that starts with you.

Thank you for your attention in this matter!

Owen Partin; Testimony - School funding - Sports

Good morning, esteemed members of the House, Senate, and everyone gathered here today.

My name is Owen Partin and I am a freshman at Belmont High School - A Dayton Public School. I'm here to speak about a pressing issue that impacts not only our students but also the future of our community. I would like to focus on the detrimental effects that the lack of funding would have for our school sports programs. According to the Dayton Daily News "Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal."

Ladies and gentlemen - Sports are far more than just games. They provide our students with essential life skills - like discipline, teamwork, resilience, and leadership. They offer a safe space for students to stay active, build friendships, and develop self-confidence. Yet, due to insufficient funding, many of these programs would be cut or severely limited, leaving our students without these invaluable opportunities.

The reality is that many of our schools are already struggling to provide the necessary equipment, uniforms, and coaching staff. From when i played football at wogamen middle school we had over 26 players while only having 18 helmets. Without these resources, students would not be able to compete at their best or even participate in some cases. For those who rely on sports as an outlet - like myself - whether to avoid negative influences or to work toward college scholarships - the lack of funding can mean the difference between success and missed opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen - We know that sports programs don't just build athletes; they build better citizens. They teach the importance of hard work, dedication, and perseverance. But without the proper financial support, we are depriving our students of these lessons.

I urge you to prioritize school funding for our district - to allow sports programs to continue in our schools. After all, our students deserve better opportunities, better resources, and a better future.

Thank you.

Colton Sylder; School Funding - Mental Health

Good morning, esteemed members of the House, Senate, and everyone gathered here concerned about the current status of school funding. My name is CJ Slyder, a junior from Belmont High School - A Dayton Public School. I'm here to address a critical issue that impacts the well-being of our students and the effect that the lack of funding will have on mental health services in our K-12 schools.

Lawmakers, in recent years, there has been a troubling trend of budget cuts in the education sector that disproportionately affect essential support services like mental health professionals and school nurses. These cuts have significant implications for student well-being and the overall health of the school environment. As of right now, our current Mental Health advisors who are licensed through Children's Hospital will not have a job at Belmont High School next year due to lack of funding. These essential people do not just provide much-needed counseling, but they also help put out the daily fires that can happen on a moment's notice.

Ladies and gentlemen, without funding, schools will have to get rid of services that not only teach self-regulation, but also help calm down students who get upset. According to Dayton Daily News, DeWine is committed to expanding mental health services for youth by allocating \$51 million in a program to provide those services to all of the state's youth. But how will this really help in a moment's notice? Well, in short it won't. The mobile response and stabilization services will provide Montgomery and Preble county services led by Choices Coordinated Care Solutions, and given a budget of \$1.8 million. Now while that may seem like a lot of money, well DPS budgets 2.5 million annually for psychological services alone. This does not include the positive school climate personnel or the success coaches who help with chronic absenteeism and addressing issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress, which are prevalent among high school students.

Everywhere we look in DPS, we see needs not being met. Lawmakers, by decreasing the funding, we are putting the burden on teachers. To not just be teachers, but caregivers, emergency nurses, counselors, as well as advocates, and sometimes parents. While the remaining mental health professionals are facing unsustainable workloads, leading to burnout and reduced effectiveness. This situation can further diminish the quality of care provided to students. The lack of proper support services can contribute to a negative school climate. Students who do not receive the necessary support may struggle with social interactions, leading to issues such as bullying or social isolation. Investing in these services can reduce long-term costs associated with untreated mental and physical health issues, which often require more extensive intervention later.

According to the Dayton Daily News "Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal." Based on this, the Dayton School Board treasurer Hiwot Abraha acknowledges that DPS would have to be put on the ballot more often to maintain funds. This reduction in funding is not only a concern for students but also raises concerns for teachers. Will they have a job

next year? Be encouraged to retire early? Now why is this an issue? Well, looking at the new teacher salary of \$48 thousand compared to the average salary of \$66 thousand, the school can save money. This has a high impact because DPS spends \$56.8 million on teachers salaries alone and they are already facing teacher shortages.

Since Governor DeWine himself notices the need for increased mental health services for today's youth. The bottom line is: without adequate mental health support, students may experience heightened stress and anxiety. This can lead to a decline in academic performance, increased absenteeism, and in severe cases, mental health crises that go unmanaged. All while the state of Ohio is asking schools to reduce their budget. Lawmakers, you must see that the potential defunding will cause more harm than good.

Thank you for your time and attention in this matter.

Aila Smith; School Funding - Extra Cirricular Programs

Good morning, esteemed members, school administrators, and everyone here today.

My name is Aila Smith, I am an 8th grader from Belmont Middle School - A *Dayton Public School*. I'm here to speak about a crucial issue that affects the overall development and well-being of our students — with the reduction of school funding Dayton Public Schools would be forced to make potential cuts to extracurricular programs such as ROTC, Arts, Band, and Choir. According to the Dayton Daily News "Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal."

Extracurricular programs are not just after-school activities; they are integral to shaping well-rounded students. For many, programs like ROTC that teach honor, courage, and commitment, while also providing invaluable life skills. The Arts — whether it's visual arts, drama, or music — gives students a creative outlet and fosters creativity (especially in a time where kids 13-17 are encouraged to use Artificial Intelligence more than ever), communication, and emotional expression. Lawmakers, band and choir are not only about music; they teach students the value of practice, perseverance, and working toward a common goal.

Unfortunately, when funding is cut, these programs are often the first to go. In kids ages 13-17, 8/10 kids participate in extracurriculars, ranging from sports to clubs, according to Urban Intitute. The impact is more than just the loss of a few hours after school - it's the loss of opportunities that help students discover their passions, build confidence, and find their sense of community. For many of us, extracurriculars are the reason we stay engaged in school. They provide a

sense of belonging, and for some of us, they are even the key to staying on track academically — example: our local debate team chapter who is gathered here before you today.

Ladies and gentlemen, cutting these programs disproportionately affects students who rely on them for a sense of purpose, personal growth, and even future career opportunities. For a lot of us these programs might be the path to college scholarships, career exploration, and emotional support for students who may not find these things in a traditional classroom setting.

So I please ask you to prioritize school funding for these extracurricular programs. We, the students deserve the chance to explore our passions, develop valuable skills, and experience the full range of opportunities that education has to offer.

Thank you for listening.