

To the honorable Chair and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Tina Fiore and I serve on the Board of Education for Northridge Local Schools, located in Harrison Township Montgomery County Ohio. This is my 10th year serving as a Board of Education Member and I am currently serving as their Vice-President.

I am submitting this testimony on HB 96 to specifically address the Cash Balance Reduction plan contained within the Bill, and to ask that you remove it from HB96.

I am urging you to remove the Cash Balance Reduction Plan as it will take our local school district from financially sound to a financial state of emergency. I want to provide a glimpse of our district and what keeping the Cash Balance Reduction Plan would jeopardize, I feel this is necessary because its sometimes easy to forget that numbers are more than numbers.

I find a few things important to point out, first our school district is set in a low socio-economic community, there are high levels of needs coupled with low levels of education and income. To allow us to provide all the services needed that come with the high level of special needs in our district we must maintain a high level of fiscal responsibility, for example we do have children who arrive at school for kindergarten and do not know how to use a fork, so we are not just teaching academic skills to our children, we must also meet a high level of needs for basic life skills lacking in our children. This puts our district behind from the start, and we do have FREE Pre-School for every resident in the district however, due to the Appalachian make up of our community many families choose to keep their children home.

Due to the above conditions our District has been extremely concentrated on meeting the needs of these students. We have not asked for an operating levy since 2011, when we passed that levy, we promised our community that we would make that last for 5 years. The Community trusted us to do that and choose to provide those funds. We are not currently on the ballot for another levy. This is evidence we are good stewards of our money and mindful of our expenditures. In the time since the 2011 levy was passed by our community members, they again came together to pass a levy for a New School Building built through the OFCC funds that levy passed easily and a New 21st century learning facility was built in our community the first of its kind in Montgomery County.

Our building was set to open in June of 2019 however we were the hardest hit community when the 4 Memorial Day Tornadoes rolled through our community and devastatingly, took out one school building and half of our neighborhood became homeless. Our district staff led the way and we met the needs of the families, Graduation went on as planned the weekend after the Tornadoes hit. We opened the new building in September of 2019, then COVID HIT! This was a challenging time but we pushed forward all the while in the

background our Staff was Training on, implementing, The Science of Reading which was fully implemented amongst the first in the State of Ohio and we were Privileged to host Gov. and First Lady DeWine. We were thrilled to be mentioned for the first time ever in the Governors State of the State address and so excited when the test scores started rolling in and our student's literacy rose to a new high level. We are not done yet; we are implementing a new Math curriculum to raise those scores up. Recently Northridge Elementary school was one of 50 out of 1200 elementary schools in the State to receive Gov DeWine's Science of Reading award.

Northridge Local Schools became a very integrated building between regular education students and special education students starting in 2023 from Pre-School -grade 12 it is not abnormal to walk into the building and see children in wheelchairs playing and learning along side those who do not have those limitations. This is a worthy but costly mission we are committed to.

Northridge Local Schools used those ESSR funds and grant opportunities to expand Tech School offerings, we have programs for our High School students to obtain certifications in the medical field, Manufacturing Certifications (many of those students have apprenticeships with DMAX making \$22), Welding Certifications (we will have 9 students obtain their official welding certification's) Parks and Recreation training (several students have internships with Harrison Township) Marketing program (our students produce shirts, banners, and PR pieces) and the CBI program to train them in soft skills that will help them obtain employment. We are currently perusing adding an ROTC program as well. There are a lot of things on the Horizon.

I tell you all of that to say yes, we are already looking at deficit spending beginning next year so unfortunately heading into our 100th year as an School District, we will need to figure out a way to make up for that deficit or go for a levy before it becomes an emergency. That will be difficult to get done since while we are not the highest taxed district we are in the top 20 taxed and socio-economically challenged. We are working on downsizing some of our real estate as a stop gap but to leave the Cash Balance Provision in HB 96 would create an immediate fiscal emergency with our district standing to lose around 8 million dollars next year if this is allowed to remain. The figures for our community to be able to make up for that loss we would have to ask for a 43-mil levy. In essence a striving school district who is making improvements in our students' educational outcomes and has been recognized on a state level for that, would turn into a district in FISCAL EMERGENCY and finding themselves in the midst of employment cuts across the entire district. Please do not jeopardize the education of the students in our small community. Our children are our future we need to be investing in them heavily!

With Respect, please remove the Cash Balance Reduction Provision from HB 96