

Testimony HB 96

Eileen Johnson, Retired public school teacher

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My name is Eileen Johnson, and I live in Avon, Ohio. I am a retired public-school teacher. I began my career teaching in Cleveland Public Schools as a middle school teacher. I later moved to Massachusetts where I taught history in a suburban high school for 36 years. I returned to Ohio 20 years ago to be close to my family. When I first moved home, I worked as a substitute teacher and a volunteer tutor. My grandson attends Shaker Heights public schools.

Speaker of the House Matt Huffman and his allies in the House of Representatives pushed a budget bill through that will shortchange [our state's public schools by \\$2.75 billion](#) over the next two years – while sending even more money to unaccountable private schools – and forking over \$600 million to the Haslam family to build a new stadium for the Cleveland Browns. Their plan will cost my district – Avon Local Schools -- more than \$565,000 over the next two years. That could mean fewer teachers, or reduced field trips, or lower quality technology. I am extremely distressed by what House budget will mean for the district where I cut my teeth as a young teacher: it will underfund Cleveland Metropolitan Schools by \$154 million, according to Policy Matters Ohio. The House budget will also take a toll on Avon's neighbors in Lorain County: For example, Amherst will be shortchanged by \$6.2 million, Elyria by \$22 million and Lorain by \$27 million.

The House budget eliminates the Fair School Funding plan, which finally fixed Ohio's unconstitutional school funding system that relied too heavily on local property taxes. The Fair School Funding Plan is important because it calculates the actual cost of educating children of all backgrounds and abilities – in rural, urban and suburban communities – and makes sure the state pays its fair share of that.

The plan, which had begun to be phased in over three budget cycles and was set to be complete in 2026-27, gave school districts the stability they need to plan for the future. If the House budget passes, they'll be thrown into chaos. That will be made even worse by the provision to return any carryover reserve over 30% to the taxpayer in the form of a one-time rebate. Our community voted against a bond issue this past November, but the last time voters approved an operating levy was in 2019. Having a healthy cash reserve is essential for districts like Avon to make their levies last – especially in a climate where

passing levies is harder than ever. More than half of school district levies failed last November.

Today, according to [Wallet Hub](#), Massachusetts, where I spent the bulk of my teaching career, is ranked number 1 for public education. Ohio is ranked thirtieth. [In 2010, our state ranked fifth in the nation](#). We should all be alarmed by this decline. It will get worse if you abandon the Fair School Funding Plan.

The budget passed by the House sets school districts up to fail. It eliminates the Fair School Funding Plan that was setting them on a path to stability while making it more difficult than ever to raise revenue locally. I urge the Senate to fully implement the plan, as lawmakers promised in 2021, and remove the arbitrary cap on cash reserves. My grandson – and millions of other Ohio children – are counting on it.