

Good morning, Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee.

My name is Danielle Firsich, and I am the Director of Public Policy for Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio and Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio. Thank you for accepting my written testimony in strong opposition to the provisions of House Bill 96 that would vastly impact Ohio's public schools and their ability to deliver a comprehensive, quality education to all Ohio youth. As this committee is well aware, approximately 90% of Ohio youth attend public schools. Dismantling a bipartisan, constitutional, and heavily vetted fair school funding plan uniquely modeled to benefit students and the student experience is both unnecessary and incredibly damaging to our public-school institutions.

Abandoning the Fair School Funding Plan in its final two years of implementation is reckless, particularly when it was created to faithfully address the finding by the Ohio Supreme Court that the state's school funding mechanism was "unconstitutional" and in need of a "complete, systemic overhaul."¹ This budget bill allocates even less money to our public school system than was allocated when prior funding models were deemed unconstitutional, leading to a proposal that provides the lowest funding of public schools in state history. In fact, according to Policy Matters Ohio, "schools will receive just 10% of what they really need from the state, shortchanging Ohio's public schools by \$2.75 billion in needed funding in just two years."²

Lawmakers cannot argue that public school funding is "unsustainable" in this state as they simultaneously: a) blow a \$1 billion annual hole in the budget to fund school vouchers for primarily wealthy families with children already enrolled in public schools, and b) allocate \$600 million to a billionaire's sports stadium passion project. For Ohio's public schools to be fully funded by the Fair School Funding Program they would need at least \$666 million allocated in the current budget--this bill allocates only \$226 million. For fiscal year 2024, the total scholarship amount for Ohio's five private school scholarship programs was \$970.7 million—vastly exceeding the amount of funding given to public schools that educate most of our state's youth.³ This budget does not honor the actual costs of educating Ohio's children, particularly those with different or additional needs. And it certainly is not supported by local school districts entrusted with such education.

Ohio's public schools are already struggling without the implementation of this reckless budget. Districts continually report overcrowded classrooms, difficulty in hiring and retaining talented educators, crumbling infrastructure, cuts to extracurricular programs, and endless school levies they are forced to rely on to fund educational programs and operations. And it is not only public-school districts, staff and students that will continue to feel the devastation of these funding cuts, but the entire surrounding community as well:

“Ohio’s constitution is clear: The state is responsible for providing a thorough and efficient system of public schools. Nowhere does it mandate the subsidization of private education. The more money we siphon away from our public schools to fund private tuition, the harder it becomes for public schools to fulfill their mission. About 90% of Ohio students attend traditional public schools. So, when those districts struggle, entire communities feel the impact. This isn’t just some abstract policy failure — it’s personal. It’s our children’s futures.”⁴

Rather than focusing on the actual costs of everything from “transportation to extracurriculars, blending property valuations with income wealth in each individual school district” per their unique and individual needs, this budget bill allows lawmakers to dictate to districts how they should be spending their money.⁵ Many districts have already detailed the adverse impact this budget bill would have on their local schools:

- Olentangy and Westerville school districts could lose over \$100 million and \$110 million respectively, placing them in “fiscal emergency territory” leading to programming and staffing cuts.⁶
- Parma City Schools would have to cut jobs, require fees to participate in extracurriculars, cut down the number of hours in class for high school students, or increase class sizes to 30 kids.⁷
- 47 of the 57 school districts in Butler, Clark, Greene, Miami, Montgomery and Warren counties would have to drastically spend down their cash carryovers to a total of \$553.7 million, leading to more levies on the ballot amidst a future of uncertain costs.⁸
- 36 districts in Hamilton, Butler, Warren and Clermont counties would face a total budget impact of more than \$350 million, with Reading school officials noting that draining those reserves now could “damage its bond rating, force budget cuts or require a new tax levy to sustain the workforce training programs it started with its state grant.”⁹

Rather than providing actual property tax relief that voters staunchly support—and which is available in more than half a dozen bipartisan pieces of legislation—this bill caps school district cash reserves and returns the remainder to taxpayers. While this form of “property tax relief” sounds innocuous on its face, it strips districts of their ability to plan for a future that could involve exponential growth requiring the funding of both new staff and new schools. Every single school district has a different tax base, as well as different challenges and opportunities. Forcing them to spend down funds to avoid potential losses if the carryover cap is exceeded is unwise, and it does nothing to equitably address rising property taxes across the state without tying it directly to the outcome of local school

districts' financial plans. Effectively, if your local school district maintains a carryover under the 30% threshold, local taxpayers are punished by getting zero property tax relief. This is not a long-term solution to rising and out of control property taxes, but a short-term fix that pins the fate of property tax relief on local school districts, rather than on the legislative body that holds responsibility for such policy.

HB96 is a betrayal of the constitutional mandate to fully and faithfully fund Ohio's public schools. If this bill were to pass, our local schools, educators, students, and communities would suffer unnecessarily. Ohio has the money to prioritize public school funding—it only lacks the political will to do so. I strongly encourage this committee to vote no on HB96.

Thank you for your time and attention.

¹ <https://www.brickergraydon.com/insights/resources/key/Chronology-of-the-DeRolph-v-Ohio-School-Funding-Litigation>

² <https://policymattersohio.org/research/house-would-scrap-fsfp-underfund-schools-by-2-75-billion/>

³ <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/10/25/ohio-spent-nearly-a-billion-dollars-on-private-school-voucher-scholarships-in-2024/>

⁴ <https://www.cleveland.com/opinion/2025/03/how-ohio-lawmakers-are-draining-public-schools-to-fund-private-education-leila-atassi.html>

⁵ <https://columbusunderground.com/advocates-fight-for-fair-school-funding-plan/#:~:text=Patterson%20put%20together%20what%20would,state%20properly%20fund%20public%20schools.>

⁶ <https://www.nbc4i.com/news/your-local-election-hq/how-ohio-budget-could-impact-local-school-funding/>

⁷ <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2025/04/01/ohio-house-gop-budget-proposal-slashes-public-school-funding/>

⁸ <https://www.daytondailynews.com/local/state-budget-could-force-area-schools-to-cut-reserves-by-more-than-500m/6EUKUSARHZFXNFHLQRP3PENPF4/>

⁹ <https://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/i-team/ohio-school-districts-could-lose-350m-from-a-new-state-rule-on-cash-reserves-heres-how-your-district-fares>