



Fairview Park City School District

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Keith Ahearn, Superintendent • Rob Showalter, Treasurer

Written Testimony to Senate Education Committee

House Bill 96- Interested Party

May 14, 2025

Keith Ahearn, Superintendent, Fairview Park City School District

Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Keith Ahearn. I am the Superintendent of Fairview Park City School District. I appreciate the chance to testify before you regarding House Bill 96, specifically the proposed 30% carry-over cap on annual school district budgets.

Fairview Park City Schools is located in Cuyahoga County. Our district includes nearly 1,500 students, 220 educators, paraprofessionals, and staff, and an annual budget of approximately \$27 million. We are one of a small handful of school districts with an overall 5-star rating on the Ohio Report Card.

Our district and community have long prided themselves on thoughtful planning, responsible budgeting, and transparent financial stewardship. Thanks to the continued support of our community, we have built strong financial reserves that allow us to avoid frequent levy requests, weather financial uncertainties, and invest in programs that benefit students today and into the future.

Unfortunately, proposed legislation in Columbus threatens to undermine this stability.

The proposed cap on school district cash reserves at 30% of their previous year's expenses would immediately jeopardize \$16.1 million of our reserves. These funds were saved deliberately over time to help Fairview Park City Schools do what our community has requested of us, which is to:

- maintain programs such as our 13 Advanced Placement courses, STEM, Music, Arts, and on-site College Credit Plus courses.
- manage building repairs;
- delay future levies;
- remain stable in the face of economic volatility; and
- maintain the highest possible bond rating

If the 30% cap remains, it would do the following:

- force us to go on the ballot more often
- penalize us for doing what taxpayers expect, to be responsible stewards of tax dollars



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- risk an optimal Moody's bond rating
- create uncertainty in our long-term planning

House Bill 96 promises property tax relief, but in reality, capping school district reserves would do the opposite. It would force districts to return to voters for additional levies, often just after local Budget Commissions have rebated those same dollars back to taxpayers. This would create a frustrating and unsustainable cycle, eroding public trust and punishing communities that have planned responsibly.

Additionally, a state law of this kind overrides local control at multiple levels, including the will of the voters, the decision-making of the local school Board, and school administration.

Public schools are not private businesses. Maintaining adequate reserves is a best practice and ensures long-term sustainability. **Our message to legislators is simple: let local communities preserve their local control and decide how to manage their schools.** Responsible savings should be rewarded, not penalized.

Our community believes that school districts should be allowed to maintain reserve levels that can be justified through short- and long-term fiscal forecasting, as we already do in our five-year forecasts. If a district can clearly demonstrate the purpose of its carryover funds, then local communities should have the flexibility to manage those resources in a way that reflects their unique needs and planning, without one-size-fits-all limits from the state.

I appreciate the opportunity to share this testimony and am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Keith Ahearn

Superintendent,

Fairview Park City Schools