



## Nordonia Hills City School District

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### Testimony in Opposition to Substitute House Bill 96

Submitted by:

Casey Wright, Superintendent & Kyle Kiffer, Treasurer/CFO  
Nordonia Hills City School District

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your continued service to the State of Ohio and for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to Substitute House Bill 96. On behalf of the Nordonia Hills City School District, we are submitting this testimony to express significant concerns about provisions in the bill that would weaken Ohio's school funding framework, restrict local fiscal flexibility, and unintentionally penalize districts that have exercised responsible, proactive financial management.

Last Tuesday, our community narrowly approved a 5-mill operating levy. We are grateful for this support and take seriously our responsibility to uphold public trust through transparency, careful planning, and a commitment to academic excellence. We thank those that supported the levy. And for those that did not support the levy, we heard them and remain committed to earning their trust. We are here to serve our students, and that will never change.

Our concern with HB 96 lies in two key areas: the replacement of the Fair School Funding Plan with a temporary guarantee, and the proposed cap on general fund balances. While we appreciate this legislative body, we urge this committee to support the continued implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan (FSFP)—a plan built by Ohio educators and finance professionals using Ohio-specific data that links school funding to both student needs and local capacity.

Disconnecting funding from this model threatens predictability and fairness. Even more troubling is the proposal to cap district fund balances, regardless of a district's context, cost pressures, or long-term planning needs.

At Nordonia Hills City Schools, we have spent the last three years working intentionally and aggressively to reduce costs and rightsize operations in response to financial pressures. That work includes:

- The reduction of 24.5 full-time certified positions, primarily through attrition
- A Board-approved employee buyout program and a strategic Reduction in Force (RIF)
- Reduction of various part-time and classified positions
- Reductions in department and building-level budgets, streamlining operations across the District
- Consolidating operations and reassigning staff to maximize efficiency—effectively “closing a building without officially closing it”

In fact, through immense effort, data-informed decisions, and collaborative leadership, we have successfully rightsized the majority of our K–12 structure—an extraordinary accomplishment in just three school years.

Conversations with peer districts reinforce how rare and difficult this level of systemic alignment is. We are proud of the results and willing to make difficult decisions in service of long-term sustainability.

These decisions are not made in isolation. We have aligned our District operations and financial strategies with a clearly defined Strategic Plan, which was created through a collaborative process involving stakeholders across our school community—including staff, families, students, and community leaders. This plan serves as our foundation for ensuring that all decisions are rooted in academic excellence, equity, fiscal responsibility, and future readiness.

Every single day, our team works to mitigate costs and manage rising expenses, while continuing to protect and enhance the quality of education we provide. One of the most significant financial challenges we face is in the area of special education. These are students who require specific support and resources, and we are fully committed to providing the services they need to succeed. However, the cost of delivering high-quality special education has increased substantially. While we will never compromise on doing what is right for students, these are the realities many districts face now and in the future.

We also remain deeply committed to community engagement and transparency. We regularly, and will continue, to communicate with families, local business owners, retirees, and other community members to ensure a shared understanding of our financial picture and academic performance. Through these conversations, we emphasize that public schools are not businesses. Our mission is not profit, but progress—ensuring students can read well, write effectively, solve problems, and become the leaders of tomorrow. We must operate within an intricate framework of state and federal regulations while providing high-quality education for every child.

Finally, we recognize the importance of supporting community members on fixed incomes, including retirees and long-time residents. We are open to and actively encourage collaborative discussions with legislators on targeted strategies that offer relief without undermining local decision-making and the ability to plan responsibly.

In closing, we urge the committee to reconsider the direction of Substitute House Bill 96. The proposed fund balance cap would discourage sound fiscal management, and the move away from the ability for District's to make their own need-based decisions. Districts like Nordonias Hills—who are making tough, informed, student-focused decisions—should be supported, not penalized.

Thank you for your attention and commitment to Ohio's schools. We thank you for what you do, and we welcome continued dialogue and stand ready to work with you to ensure this funding system remains flexible, predictable, and focused on student success.

Sincerely,



Kyle Kiffer  
Treasurer/CFO  
Nordonias Hills City School District



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Superintendent  
Nordonias Hills City School District