

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF FUNDING OHIO PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO ACHIEVE HIGH PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on what excellence in education looks like, its relevance to a thriving future economy, and the steps to begin this goal in the next budget.

My name is Anne Kmieck. I am a recently retired high school educator. At the age of 39, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in education after more than a decade as curator of a history museum that was embedded in the City of Cleveland government. Many areas of knowledge are needed to research and tell stories of police history. Topics included the U.S. Constitution, local and state laws, socio economics, immigrant communities, individual neighborhood cultures, police technology and its evolution, science in investigations, the role of state and federal funding, and the political climate of a particular era. What really stood out to me, however, was the intersection of the quality of training of police personnel themselves and the quality of schools in the neighborhoods they served. Underfunded schools correlated with lower economic outcomes, desperation, lack of healthcare access, and crime.

During my year of graduate work in public schools, this introvert found the classroom very stimulating as my relationships with young people developed over time. I had requested that my cooperative experience take place in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. There, I came to cherish the high level of conversations with students, their quick mastery of lessons and innovative ideas, the way they owned their journey of resourcefulness, and their ability to articulate to each other their discoveries. Only later was I completely shocked to learn how low their point averages were.

Furthermore, their individual stories were mind-bending, far removed from my personal experience of growing up in a middle-class suburb. Immediately after graduation, I had two interviews, one for a public school and one for a private school. As I turned into the gorgeous 275-acre campus of an independent school, I was viscerally reminded of Jonthan Kozol descriptions between private and many public schools in his seminal book, *Savage Inequalities*. Four hours after the interview, the school called back with an offer for a one-year contract. My department chair persuaded me that I would learn much about what excellence in education looked like, and even more importantly, what was needed for our underfunded public schools.

In the end, I spent 24 years in this non-sectarian private school that intentionally sought to diversify its families and educators in terms of cultures, socio-economic class, and religion. Like my colleagues in public schools, I designed new curricula or enhanced current ones every year, advised students, worked

on committees, researched, and trained in updated technology and procedures all toward mentoring students into owning their learning journeys, and prepare them for the next level.

What non-educators do not understand, every moment in the classroom we are on high alert for the cognitive and emotional well-being of our students. We must be flexible and creative to pivot when lessons that worked great for one group of students are missing the mark with another. When a student isn't learning or suddenly their performance has changed, we need to find out what's going on. This involves conversations with their other teachers, the learning specialists, the school psychologists, and of course, their families. If a school is underfunded, classes overcrowded, there is not enough responsive support staff, nor adequate time to put out fires of social, behavioral, or learning nature that happen in growing human beings, the entire community feels the weight of helplessness, and the mission of people who go into education is compromised. After all, we are not there for personal glory, fame, and fortune. If some of our students go on to that, we celebrate their successes.

In my years teaching, I frequently participated in the Greater Cleveland Congregation's educational committees' activities. We often heard testimony from public school teachers, administrators, and students themselves. I recall one gathering where students testified that they experienced constant trauma merely going back and forth to school from gangs and drive by shootings. They told of their despair after a student died in front of them. They begged us to understand that schools had to share counselors when the need was so great in many schools. I recall the CEO of CMSD in his final comments crying as he explained his helplessness to offer students a solution because this statehouse had just notified him that they were withdrawing millions of dollars of earmarked funds for the following school year.

So, what does excellence require so that every child in Ohio graduates with a record of academic and extracurricular achievements that make the child and their family proud? In addition to outstanding well-compensated certified teachers, schools need excellent learning resources, an enriching choice of extracurriculars, clean and safe spaces, and special support teams in every school that can respond to children's learning, emotional, and trauma challenges regardless of student family zip codes.

How can this be achieved?

First, the voucher system is unconstitutional and draining money from schools that almost all Ohio students attend. It seems that there is a miscomprehension that public access to an excellent education is one of the pillars of a democracy. It feels like democracy is being intentionally suppressed by elite donors of election campaigns who prefer to have mediocre educational outcomes for less privileged

communities to better subjugate future workers. This attitude is rooted in our country's history. Today it is rearing its ugly head again and cloaking itself in a perversion of "family values". Dismantling funding from public schools will impact a major fraction of 90% of Ohio's public students, their communities, and their future potential. This is not, in any way, pro-family, this is not, in any way, pro-American.

I am a product of 13 years of Catholic education. In both my own childhood education and my career as a private school educator, schools were financially supported by their own communities, their families and alumni. I strongly believe that private schools need to exist by virtue of their own community support, not public funds. If their communities no longer support their schools, it is not the public's problem. They need to examine why.

Second, I urge you to invest in phase three of the Fair School Funding Plan. I want my taxes to fund Ohio public schools to their full capacity to ensure that every student graduates and continues to thrive in their life ahead.

Third, I urge you to recognize that public school districts are engaging in fiducial responsibility when they prepare for rising costs by rolling over funds annually so that they can remain operational in between school levies. I sense many of you may not be well informed about the unconstitutionality of the present funding of schools through property taxes, nor the investment of time and energy required to pass levies every few years.

Finally, I understand that there is a surplus in Ohio's budget. Excellent public education results in economic growth, widespread prosperity, and dynamic, healthier communities. In addition to education resulting in a resourceful, competent, and innovative workforce, I can imagine as our southern and western states face increasing challenges with climate change, that corporations and institutions would look to move north. Investing in public education now, would make Ohio a prominent contender.

Excellent public education, prosperity, and dynamic communities all go together.

As you finalize Ohio's budget, I urge you to make our public schools and our children a top priority as the key to realizing this state's full economic potential. If you haven't visited any of our high performing public schools recently, there are some in the Columbus area. Imagine every school having their resources. Wouldn't it be wonderful if future government, private, and institutional entities regarded Ohio as a model for the future because the statehouse decided in its 2025 2026 budget that public education was the key toward planning for the future?

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions.