

Good morning, respected members of the House, senate, school administrators, and everyone here today.

My name is Ivan Baraka, I'm an 8th grader from Belmont Middle School - At Dayton Public Schools. I'm here to speak on behalf of our English as a Second Language (ESL) students, who are among the most vulnerable in our school system. The lack of funding for our schools is threatening essential programs like ESL, and I believe this issue cannot be ignored. Dayton public schools have over 1,700 students in ESL programs which is about 13% of our overall student population. According to the Dayton Daily News "Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal."

Lawmakers, please understand that our ESL programs are crucial for helping non-native English speakers succeed in school and beyond. These students come from diverse backgrounds and often face additional challenges in learning, not only academically but also in adapting to a new culture. So without proper language support, these students are at a significant disadvantage, struggling to keep up with their peers and will often stop coming to school.

Our ESL teachers at Dayton Public Schools provide the specialized instruction these students need to develop their language skills and thrive in the classroom. However, if funding cuts continue as proposed, we risk reducing the number of ESL teachers, lowering the quality of instruction, and ultimately failing to meet the needs of our growing ESL student population. This would not only hinder their academic progress but could also impact their emotional well-being and sense of belonging in the school community.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are at a crossroads where the lack of funding could lead to overcrowded ESL classrooms, reduced resources, and fewer opportunities for language support. So this is not just about providing language instruction—this is about ensuring that every student has a fair chance to succeed, regardless of their background. Removing the ESL program could isolate large districts, making them vulnerable due to a lack of understanding of English the base language in the U.S. If America is truly the melting pot - where everyone has the chance to be successful - and live the American Dream - then please show me - by funding our schools and these critical programs.

I urge you to prioritize funding for ESL programs. Our students deserve the resources they need to succeed academically, and we must ensure they are not left behind because of these proposed budget cuts.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.