

Dear Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram and Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony on the state budget. I want to share three urgencies with you, as a parent. As an educator. As a community member. And as an Ohioan who cares about our state's long-term growth and success.

1. I'm worried that you're defunding our state's public schools by not using the Fair School Funding formula while simultaneously increasing funding for voucher programs and private education. I'm asking you to please properly implement the Fair School Funding formula and help us ensure the strong education of our kids. My kids, your kids, our neighbors' kids.

According to data from the Department of Education and Workforce, there are 3117 traditional public schools across the 611 districts in our state. Those schools serve 1.48 million students across Ohio - urban, suburban, small town and rural districts (source: <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Frequently-Requested-Data/Facts-and-Figures>). The current House budget you're considering uses outdated data to calculate the state's contribution to local districts. And when they failed to fund those schools properly by moving dollars away from those districts, taking resources away from those students, and adding financial burdens to those communities, they hurt us all. The Senate has the chance to fix this issue and ensure our schools can do their work. When I look at the data from your own districts, I see how critical this issue must be for each of you, too. Most of the communities you serve - the children in your districts' schools - attend your community's public schools.

| K-12 Education Options by Ohio County - Enrollment and Number of Schools |            |                                  |                                   |                                   |                              |          |                           |           |                                   |                  |
|--|------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Source: Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, Reports Portal       |            |                                  |                                   |                                   |                              |          |                           |           |                                   |                  |
|  | County     | Public School Enrollment 2023-24 | Private School Enrollment 2023-24 | Charter School Enrollment 2023-24 | Total Enrollment All Schools | % public | # Private Schools 2024-25 | # Charter | # Non-Chartered nonpublic 2024-25 | Total Non-Public |
| Brenner, A   | Coshocton  | 4,276                            | 252                               | 0                                 | 4,528                        | 94%      | 2                         | 1         | 3                                 | 6                |
| Brenner, A   | Delaware   | 34,748                           | 2,045                             | 0                                 | 36,793                       | 94%      | 8                         | 0         | 10                                | 18               |
| Brenner, A   | Holmes     | 3,201                            | 0                                 | 0                                 | 3,201                        | 100%     | 0                         | 0         | 1                                 | 1                |
| Brenner, A   | Knox       | 7,013                            | 207                               | 0                                 | 7,220                        | 97%      | 3                         | 0         | 8                                 | 11               |
| Cutrona, A   | Carroll    | 2,316                            | 0                                 | 0                                 | 2,316                        | 100%     | 0                         | 0         | 1                                 | 1                |
| Cutrona, A   | Columbiana | 12,167                           | 674                               | 127                               | 12,968                       | 94%      | 3                         | 2         | 4                                 | 9                |
| Cutrona, A   | Mahoning   | 25,092                           | 3,351                             | 2,501                             | 30,944                       | 81%      | 15                        | 11        | 1                                 | 27               |
| Huffman, S   | Miami      | 15,434                           | 1,095                             | 0                                 | 16,529                       | 93%      | 7                         | 0         | 3                                 | 10               |
| Huffman, S   | Preble     | 5,621                            | 0                                 | 0                                 | 5,621                        | 100%     | 0                         | 0         | 1                                 | 1                |
| Koehler, K   | Clark      | 18,199                           | 1,168                             | 591                               | 19,958                       | 91%      | 6                         | 4         | 4                                 | 14               |
| Koehler, K   | Clinton    | 5,926                            | 276                               | 0                                 | 6,202                        | 96%      | 1                         | 0         | 1                                 | 2                |
| Koehler, K   | Greene     | 20,538                           | 1,432                             | 134                               | 22,104                       | 93%      | 8                         | 2         | 1                                 | 11               |
| Smith, K; Antonio, N; Patton, T.   | Cuyahoga   | 128,311                          | 32,838                            | 13,112                            | 174,261                      | 74%      | 125                       | 76        | 24                                | 225              |
| Blessing; Ingram   | Hamilton   | 99,992                           | 28,950                            | 8,804                             | 137,746                      | 73%      | 95                        | 23        | 13                                | 131              |

When I look at the current numbers in the budget, I'm discouraged, so I'm here to hold you, hold us all accountable to understanding what's happening. In the current version of the state budget, an additional \$432.6 million more will go to voucher programs and only \$226 million more will go to public schools. I hear legislators say that funding Ohio's public schools is "unsustainable" while giving more money to private schools and funding \$600 million of the new Cleveland Browns football stadium. There is no doubt - school funding in Ohio is complicated. I am grateful for the experts working to understand it and project out our needs. Perhaps a collaborative approach could help us do the right thing here - creating a working group or commission working to figure out our long-term plans, working to do the right thing for our students, year over year. And that right thing should be guided more by the Fair School Funding formula and less by the needs of a football team. We can do this right!

2. I know you heard from folks earlier this week, but please, please restore the Public Library Fund to a fixed percentage of state revenue - at least 1.7% (the current amount). Our libraries are so important. I loved taking my children when they were young, attending story hours on winter days when we just had to get out of the house and being at the library saved our sanity. Libraries are a hub of community events, too - my son's senior art show was hosted at our library, and the whole community was able to celebrate the creativity and beauty of our students' work. And today, libraries host our book clubs, bring in guest speakers, stock all the best sellers, and librarians pay attention to what the community needs - more resources for those learning English, more early childhood programs, more events for older adults. Libraries are hubs of joy, learning, community, care and connection - as well as places for books and technology access. Please fund our libraries with at least 1.7% of state revenue.

3. Please do not add SB 113/HB 155 as an amendment to this budget. For years, you've been hearing from Ohioans who oppose legislative actions to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion in K-12 education. And we will continue to use our voices and people power to let you know our opposition. Recently Senator Brenner shared how inspired he was by Dr. Martin Luther King, stating how important Dr. King's vision is. Dr. King's vision was to eliminate poverty through universal basic income (source: <https://projects.seattletimes.com/mlk/words-going.html>). To build a multiracial democracy (source: <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2023/01/martin-luther-kings-multiple-lanes-to-multiracial-democracy/>). To see color, recognize our differences, name our identities, and move forward toward a peaceful future. And if we eliminate diversity. If we eliminate equity. And we eliminate inclusion - inclusion for children with learning differences, who need accommodations for physical challenges, who are learning English, who benefit from social-emotional learning supports in school, who need our support to thrive - we hurt those children and families, and that hurts all of Ohio.

I think that's the jist of my request to you today. To lessen harm and instead, to step into the mighty power you have to build success across our state by funding our schools and libraries, and being champions for every single Ohio student, no matter their zip code, language, faith, family structure, race, gender or learning needs.



Lisa Vahey