

Testimony for Am. Sub. H. B. No. 96
Senate Education Committee
May 13, 2025

Sherri Smith, Ohio Citizen for 67 years

Chair Andrew Brenner
Vice Chair Louis Blessing, III
Ranking Member Catherine Ingram
and Members of the Education Cmte.
of the Ohio Senate

Interested Party

Good Morning. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Sherri N. Smith. I am the proud Grandmother of a student that currently attends Columbus Gifted Academy (CGA). He is a 3.5/4.0 GPA student. He will be graduating this year and moving on to a public high school in Columbus, Ohio. My grandson has already been accepted to the public school of his choice, and he had a choice.

If you're not familiar with CGA, you should be. CGA is not a lottery school. Placement there is through the Gifted & Talented Division of Columbus City Schools. Children are tested. My grandson is a very smart child. I wish I was as smart as him and his family, including his sister who graduated last year from a public school and is in a 4-year college now; his dad, which is my son and who works for the Columbus Police Department; my daughter-in-law, a former Valedictorian at Eastmoor High School and is 2now a CPA; and my mother, Barbara Jean Smith Richey Glover Tucker Covington, who graduated from Columbus East High School at 16 years old, God rest her soul. My mother was told by her teachers that she didn't have to work so hard in school because she was only going to be cleaning houses for certain folks. Thank God my mother got a great public school education. She went on to graduate from Franklin University, Capital University, and attended OSU's Ph.D. program. She was one of the main people to install the computerized billing system for the Columbus Division of Water. See, public education works. Instead of cutting funding, our state should be increasing funding. There are many children attending public schools that deserve a fair chance. I'm not asking for DEI. I'm asking for fairness.

I'm expressing my concern about cuts to public education funding, especially for Columbus City Schools. I am in support of fully funding Ohio's public schools in the budget.

I'd like to know how we're showing our youth, in public schools, that we care about them? How are we showing the children, and the world, that we, Ohioans, care about the future of our beloved Ohio when our leaders have decided not to put the money on the children that

are Ohio's future? People across the US, and around the world, are watching us, and especially our Legislators. I'm betting on our children, especially since most of Ohio's kids attend public schools.

I want the best for my grandson and for every child in Ohio. When I went into the CGA building to see my grandson in a play, I was deeply saddened when I saw how the building looked inside. It's depressing. Take a tour for yourself. It needs to be renovated and that takes money. I know the school building is 100 years old. Our Ohio Statehouse is more than 150 years, but even the Statehouse has had extensive renovations. 25 years ago, Legislators spent more than \$120 million dollars on Statehouse renovation. Do you know what that cost would be today? Also, Legislators recently agreed to a capital bill, likely the largest in Ohio's history according to internet-AI, which included \$21.6 million for Statehouse repairs and security, and \$59.1 million for renovations at the state's office towers. I recently went into the beautiful Riffe building, and it is beautiful with solid marble walls, beautiful offices, elevators, plush seating, and on-going remodeling over the escalator. I am happy for our Legislative community. I am happy that our Legislators understand the importance of spending money on keeping them and our state facilities beautiful, and safe. It's a very productive environment. Our children deserve this too. This is what our public schools need now. The children at CGA deserve better. These children, White, Brown, Black, and every color in between are smart and they deserve a beautiful, safe environment too. I really have a problem with schools not having enough funding to fix up the interior of a school and pay teachers a decent living wage. Our best and brightest deserve safe and secure facilities. Why don't we ask our professional sports players making over \$500,00.00 to allocate 1% of their salaries to paying teachers' salaries? They might help.

Our public schools need to keep that money that you're talking about cutting from the state budget. 45,000 students need it. These cuts will hurt our children, our schools, our communities, and possibly our state. We need their brain-power. At a time when costs are soaring, like the cost for a carton of eggs recently, Ohio cannot afford to shortchange our beloved state's future by not fully supporting Ohio's public school system. By giving less funding to public schools, you weaken the structure of our whole system, our way of life. By not investing in an important part of Ohio's strength, we all lose. We ALL lose. Your grandkids might fall in love with someone attending a public school. Don't you want them to be the best they can be? Their education matters. Public education has been one of the best investments our state, and our country, has ever made.

Some investments look good, but then things happen. Teams have losing seasons and attendance goes way down, thereby losing money. I was hoping that Intel would be built by next year, but sadly that won't happen until 2031, if at all now. Wow! That's been very disheartening for many high school students in Ohio. Especially since Ohio has already spent, and tied up, a ton of money in Intel. Sadly, that investment is looking quite shaky. However, when it comes to public education, and Ohio's children, I'd make that investment any day because it's an important, sound and reasonable investment that WILL

benefit Ohio, Ohioans, and America. By putting our tax dollars into a sound investment like our children through the public education system, all Ohioans win! It's NOT a crapshoot. We cannot expect the best end results, if we're shortchanging our children throughout their development. That's what a cut to public school funding does, it shortchanges them, and Ohio.

I watched how private schools kick out kids when they need more help. The schools want, and show, a 100% graduation rate; but you don't see what happens to the children that get kicked out. They're not dumb. They're not stupid. They just need more encouragement and more help. Thank God, they can go to public schools and work hard to excel with the support they need.

We, Ohioans, need our Ohio Legislators and our Ohio Governor to properly fund public education in the state of Ohio. It's the right thing to do for our children and for Ohio. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote yes to funding the Fair School Funding Plan. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Sherri Smith