

Dear Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson,

Thank you for considering my testimony in support of fully implementing the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan in Ohio's budget.

I am a former educator who has taught in both public and private schools. I strongly object to the House version of the state's budget, which ELIMINATES the Fair School Funding Plan, a plan that was carefully researched over the course of four years and has had strong bipartisan support.

The final phase of this plan (which had finally addressed the DeRolph decision of the 90s) has been discarded in favor of offering even MORE taxpayer money to private schools – a blatantly unconstitutional use of public funds. Ohio's constitution specifically states that taxpayer money must provide a “thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state.”

Public schools are held accountable to taxpayers through elected boards of education. Who holds private schools accountable for the taxpayer funds they are receiving from taxpayers through the expanded voucher program? If the current budget is passed, taxpayers can expect to see even MORE money being funneled away from public schools and into private schools, with little to no accountability.

Public schools must accept all students living in their district, including those students who require more time, attention and resources due to disabilities, etc. Public schools cannot simply refuse to serve students who are difficult to educate.

If the budget passes without the full implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan, including updated cost inputs, ALL Ohio communities will suffer no matter where they are located in our state, but those in rural areas and low-income communities will be hit hardest. Communities will then be asked to pass levies more often to make up for the loss of funding, and those levies will be increasingly difficult to pass. If the aim is to dismantle public schools (where 90 percent of Ohio's students attend), then the House version of the budget bill appears to be a move in that direction. I seriously doubt that Ohio voters want to see their public schools undermined and their tax dollars being funneled instead to Ohioans who already enroll their children in private schools.

Public schools have, for many years, provided transportation for district students who attend private schools. Will this burden be taken away from them if they are stripped of the resources promised through full funding of the Fair School Funding Plan?

Can taxpayers expect to recoup losses if a private/charter school misuses taxpayer funds? We haven't yet seen the \$117 million that ECOT still owes Ohio. Since ECOT never has been held fully accountable, a clear message has been sent to the next pop-up private school hoping to make a fast buck on the backs of Ohio taxpayers while shortchanging students who deserve the best educational experience they can get.

House Speaker Matt Huffman has suggested that full implementation of the Fair School Funding

Plan is “unsustainable,” while at the same time proposing that \$600 million in taxpayer funds be allocated to build a new Browns stadium.

Where are our priorities?

I sincerely hope that the Senate Finance Committee will stand firmly behind the 90 percent of students in Ohio who attend public schools. Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Deborah Cooper