



Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this written, interested party testimony on House Bill 96, the State Operating Budget. My name is Tom Goodney, and I am the Superintendent of the ESC of Central Ohio. Our ESC serves over 225,000 students in its client school districts and area career technical centers, while also providing direct services and supports to community schools, STEM schools, and chartered nonpublic schools, including catholic schools within Central Ohio and across the state. Our ESC has been a long-standing partner with both the Department of Education and Workforce and the Ohio Legislature in policymaking and implementation. As this committee deliberates the biennial budget, I would ask that you keep the work of the ESC of Central Ohio in mind, as we have worked towards the same goals of supporting and preparing all schools to ensure the focus is on students and their academic and post-academic success.

During the 134th General Assembly, the ESC of Central Ohio, along with the Montgomery County ESC, was tasked with implementing and operating a small transportation pilot program. The goal of this program was to alleviate some of the pressure points felt by districts for students who experience significant transportation-related challenges. The ESC of Central Ohio is currently transporting about 60 students through a mix of ESC-owned and contracted vans to the Graham Family of Schools in Columbus. This pilot program has also helped the ESC of Central Ohio to think creatively and innovate in response to client districts and schools, providing a new rapid response service. For emergency student placement situations, school districts are able to call the day before transportation is needed, and the ESC will transport the student the next day. We are currently operating this program with several school districts in the region.

As the House deliberated the budget earlier this spring, transporting Ohio students continued to present immense logistical challenges for all sorts of schools and districts. To that end, the ESC of Central Ohio supported the Ohio Educational Service Center Association's (OESCA) House budget request for strategic investments in transportation solutions across Ohio, including Central Ohio and the Dayton region. In lieu of expanding transportation solutions due to a tighter economic and fiscal outlook for Ohio, we ask the Senate to support the ESC of Central Ohio's transportation pilot program via amendment SC0289, in addition to the Montgomery County program already in the House budget.

Our ESC, as directed by the legislature and administration over 17 years ago, governs and co-administers the work of the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI). OCALI uses data, research, and evidence-based strategies to shape policy and practice designed to promote access for people with disabilities. When we promote access and independence, people are able to grow, learn, and live their best lives. OCALI is not just an Ohio resource, but a nationally and internationally recognized resource for students, families, educators, and other professionals working with students and adult learners with autism and low incidence and those who are deaf or blind. OCALI is unique in its administration because the professionals focus solely on the mission – the ESC is responsible for administrative and managerial tasks. This strategic separation of duties ensures that the students, families, and educators served by OCALI come first. This work is vital and has made Ohio a leader in this field. As Ohio is required to provide technical assistance to support the implementation of special education, including for children with autism, and with such a critical mission, we request that you support reinstating current law via amendment SC0758, allowing primary consideration of OCALI as a state resource assigned to the ESC of Central Ohio.



Finally, I would request that the Senate maintain the House's version of the budget (EDUCD11) regarding the removal of provisions that substantially changed the Educational Regional Service System or ERSS, that is currently in Chapter 3312 of the Ohio Revised Code. For background, Chapter 3312 was born out of decisive action by legislatures past to ensure students received the best education possible by empowering ESCs to act as a holistic support system for schools, administrators, and educators. Within 3312, 16 ESCs are utilized regionally to maximize student outcomes and successes, ensure administrative efficiencies, provide professional development, support special education services, and prevent duplication of programming. While the ESC of Central Ohio is not opposed to certain aspects of Governor DeWine's initial changes, we, like your House counterparts, would request that any proposed alterations to the current system be done collaboratively and outside of an operating budget.

The ESC of Central Ohio is committed to supporting the work of the state, its schools, its educators, and most importantly, its students as we look to emphasize their future opportunities to be educated, to work, and to thrive in the workforce here in Ohio. This is a vital component of our public purpose in federal and state policy.

I look forward to leading our ESC as we grow our impact in these areas, in partnership with the state, through continued investment and collaboration in House Bill 96 and beyond. Chair Cirino and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to offer written testimony, and I would be happy to meet with any of you to answer questions and discuss the work of the ESC of Central Ohio.