

**Testimony on HB 96 – Senate Finance Committee  
Presented by Dave Hofer, Vice President, Board of Education  
Springfield Local Schools (Summit County)**

**Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hudson, and Members of the Finance Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 96. I appreciate the difficult and important work you are undertaking, and I commend you for your commitment to Ohio's education system.

The House Education Committee held extensive hearings on HB 96, resulting in some notable provisions, including increased funding for transportation and bus safety, expanded school vouchers, additional resources for public schools, and a proposed cap on cash carryover balances at 30%. Today, I want to focus on the implications of that 30% cap and related concerns.

Representative David Thomas has indicated that under the current HB 96 structure, every school district receives more funding. However, the statewide carryover balance among Ohio's 614 districts and community schools is approximately \$10.5 billion. This number has drawn attention. But it's critical to understand that these balances vary greatly—some districts have higher reserves due to recent bond issues, construction projects, or sound fiscal planning.

For Springfield Local Schools in Summit County, our cash carryover balance is currently about 21%—well below the proposed cap. We have not passed a new operating levy in nearly 25 years. When a district places a levy on the ballot and it passes, the resulting funds begin to build. Over time, however, these funds are consumed by rising costs in salaries, healthcare, retirement contributions, and especially instructional materials and technology. Once those reserves are depleted, we are back at the beginning of the levy cycle.

A rigid 30% cap on carryover balances would undermine the financial stability of districts like ours. It would hinder our ability to plan for the future, create confusion among our stakeholders, and potentially jeopardize operations. The State Auditor's Association has expressed concerns about this provision, and I respectfully urge this committee to reconsider its implementation. A more productive alternative might be to explore limits on levies tied to inflation, should inflation again become a pressing concern.

Furthermore, Springfield Local taxpayers currently shoulder 61.8% of our district's funding, while the state's contribution is only 38.2%. As property values rise, the state's share continues to shrink. If current funding formulas remain unchanged, the state's share is projected to fall even further—to 32.2% by FY 2027—well below the 46.2% state share that was in place during the DeRolph ruling. And remember: these projections assume inputs from FY22, despite clear inflationary pressures since then.

On the topic of vouchers, I understand and respect the legislature's support for school choice. However, the core intent of school choice—ensuring quality education options for all students—appears to be getting lost. Many private schools that accept vouchers rely on public districts to provide essential services, especially special education. Yet they are not always required to follow Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), unlike public schools, which are held legally and financially accountable.

This creates a two-tiered system. Private schools are not subject to the same rigorous standards as public schools. Public districts face harsh consequences if labeled "developing" or "ineffective"—including mandates, interventions, and reporting requirements—while many private schools receiving public dollars are not subject to comparable accountability, including standardized testing and report card evaluations.

These mandates also pull public school staff away from instructional work to focus on compliance issues, further impacting student learning. This is not a level playing field.

Moreover, while private schools benefit from voucher and state funding, public schools must also allocate a portion of federal funds to support services for these same institutions. However, the reverse is not true—voucher funds are not redistributed to benefit public schools. This asymmetry further strains the public education system.

And while our district is slated to receive an additional \$3,500 under HB 96, this increase is a **pittance** compared to the rising costs we face due to inflation. The funding increases for public schools have not kept pace with the true cost of delivering a modern, high-quality education—especially when contrasted with the expanding support for private institutions through voucher programs.

Finally, public schools are obligated to educate all students. Private schools can choose who to admit—and who to expel. When students are asked to leave private schools, they return to the public school system, often needing additional support. Meanwhile, public schools are left to meet these needs with fewer resources and increasing restrictions under laws like HB 96.

I urge you to consider the long-term implications of this legislation on public education in Ohio. School choice should not come at the expense of fairness, accountability, and the core mission of educating **all** children.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of these concerns. I would welcome the opportunity to further discuss the impact of this bill on our students and community.

Sincerely,

**Dave Hofer**

Vice President, Board of Education

Springfield Local Schools (Summit County)

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