

Opponent Testimony for HB 96

Seth Bower

President

Groveport Madison Local School Board

To Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 96. My name is Seth Bower. I am a parent, community member, and current President of the Groveport Madison Local School Board. I care deeply about the future of public education in Ohio.

HB 96 doesn't just reduce funding by \$103 million over the next two years — it dismantles the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan (FSFP), which was designed to make school funding more equitable, more transparent, and more responsive to the actual costs of educating students. The plan was adopted in 2021 with a six-year phase-in, and this budget veers off course just halfway through.

For example, in my district, under the House's plan, we would receive \$500,000 less in fiscal year 2027 than in fiscal year 2025. That gap means larger class sizes, fewer support staff, and fewer opportunities for students — all while communities are asked to do more with less.

Meanwhile, this budget increases funding for unaccountable and unconstitutional private voucher programs and allows public dollars to be funneled through Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs), which offer tax credits for donations to private schools. In the last year alone, over \$12 million in tax credits were awarded through SGOs — quietly draining resources from public schools.

Much of this agenda is being shaped by well-funded groups like the Center for Christian Virtue, whose revenues and influence have grown dramatically, and who are now receiving state-funded grants to expand private religious schools. This is not what public education funding was intended for.

And now, while public investment is being pulled back, a petition to eliminate local property taxes — the primary remaining source of school funding — has been approved for signature collection. If both efforts succeed, many schools will be left with no viable funding source at all.

As someone who is a parent of three kids in public schools while also working daily to advocate for every child in my district, I see firsthand what happens when schools are underfunded: This leads to poor learning conditions and unsafe schools. In my district we have schools that don't have walls, and curtains that separate our classrooms. In my district we are overcapacity in nearly all of our buildings, yet we face the unprecedented challenge of increased growth. Every child in my district is a child of promise, and we deserve to give every child the best that we can.

Public education is a public good. It deserves full, fair, and sustainable funding — not dismantling by budget.

I urge this committee not just to reject the House's version of this budget, but to amend it — to fully restore the Fair School Funding Plan, remove punitive provisions like the 30% carryover clawback rule, and realign this budget with the promise Ohio made to its students, families, and communities.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to shaping a better version of this budget.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Bower', with a stylized, flowing script.

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