

Testimony for House Bill [96]
Senate Education Committee
May 27, 2025

Rev. Sarah Beach

Chair Jerry Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, and members of the Finance Committee of the Ohio Senate:

Hello, my name is Rev. Sarah Beach. I am an Ohio voter, a pastor at Westwood United Methodist Church, and a parent of two awesome kids who attend Gamble Montessori Elementary in Cincinnati Public Schools. I am here today to urge you to continue to use the bipartisan Fair School Funding Formula for our kids and the future of our state.

Ohio schools have been unconditionally funded since I was a kid in the 90s. I grew up in a rural Appalachian school district that didn't have enough money to have enough books and desks to go around. My parents were public school teachers and they spent their own money for classroom supplies but also to buy breakfast for hungry kids in their class. I was so thankful to see the bipartisan fair school funding formula pass as a positive change, but now my kids' district is now being affected by out of whack budgets. Cincinnati Public is set to be 39 million shy of the fair school funding formula. (Policy Matters Ohio)

My children's school sent a Go Fund Me request in a Wednesday folder for math books next year. Governor Dewine went to the Oval Office cheering on the dismantling of the Department of Education, while admitting he has no idea what that looks like for our state. I have concerns about the implications to Title 1 and IDEA at the federal level, being further compounded by the state budget not fully funding education. In light of the recent federal and state budget, my child is losing access to a mental health therapist and the Cincinnati Public School Board and Superintendent are looking to fire half the paraprofessionals in all the Montessori schools, along with social workers and English Language Learners Instructors. My alma mater, Bethel Tate, is considering firing teachers. Here we are again, unconstitutionally funded schools, rippling across the generations.

While I care about all of the kids in our great Buckeye state, especially low income families and kids with disabilities, I am especially concerned about the implications for my son, who has an IEP. He has gone from Ds and Fs to absolutely thriving and on the Honor Roll after receiving support from teachers and Intervention Specialists, OTs, and SLPs, who are the unsung heroes of our school system.

A right to a public education is enshrined in our state constitution. It is vital for the future of our state and workforce development. A budget is a reflection on our values. We need to prioritize the essentials first, public education and infrastructure before doling out money to special interest groups.

As a pastor, I do not believe private schools should receive public funding. My church is able to create programs and fund them appropriately, and I believe religious schools should do the same. Charter schools are not held to the same financial or educational standards. Dohn Academy which was in my neighborhood, has misused 4 million taxpayer dollars, including on apartments in Puerto Rico and restaurant ownership. The IDEA School in Cincinnati is plagued by bullying and has hundreds of millions of dollars sitting in the account. Private and charter schools often will not accept kids with disabilities or behavior problems, and most rural areas do not have access across the state. My kids go to public schools Monday through Friday, and Sunday School where trusted adults that I know and trust are providing an appropriate Christian education. United Methodists believe in three simple rules: to do good, to do no harm, and to stay in love with God. I believe our state budget actively and deeply harms all of our kids and our future.

Property taxes are high not because schools need rainy day funds capped, but because the state budget is not covering their fair share of school funding.

As state leaders, I urge you to continue with the bipartisan Fair School Funding formula, to support families like mine throughout the state. Public Education should not be a controversial issue, divided by red or blue, rural, suburban, or urban areas, but everyone should care for the common good of all of our kids, because it is the right and responsible thing to do. As the Ohio General Assembly, do you really want your legacy to strip public schools and libraries of funding to give the Cleveland Browns billionaires \$600 Million dollars to build a stadium? Please amend the House Budget to provide for our state's biggest treasure, our kids! Thank you for listening, and for doing the right thing for Ohio's bright future.