

Opponent Testimony for HB 96

Christa Gould

Community Member, Employee at Ohio State University

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 Christa Gould. I am a community member and educator currently living in Columbus, Ohio. I attended Berea City Schools in the Cleveland area and graduated in 2004. At the time I graduated, Ohio was ranked as one of the top states in terms of education. I am deeply saddened to see that we are currently ranked at No. 30, according to the most recent data from *U.S. News World & Report*. I care deeply about the future of public education in Ohio, and I would love to see that state eventually regain its high ranking in education. However, under current leadership at the Statehouse and the policies proposed in this state, I doubt that possibility.

One such example that is harming our ability to deliver high-quality public education that every child deserves is HB 96. This bill 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.

The consequences of this bill will mean 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 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 501(c)(4) 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 I say that as a Christian myself.

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 has been educated and worked in our public schools, I see firsthand what happens when schools are underfunded: Programs that promote the arts are dismantled, school buildings fall apart, class sizes increase, and our ability to attract and retain qualified teachers is diminished.

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,

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