

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Tom Roberts, and I serve as the President of the Ohio Conference of Branches of the NAACP. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today in strong support of the full implementation and phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan.

Education is not just a policy issue for us. It is a civil rights issue, which is why I'm here representing one of the oldest and most respected civil rights organizations. Education is the foundation for economic mobility, stability, civic engagement, and equal opportunity. For too long Ohio has failed to meet its duty to ensure every child, regardless of their zip code, race, or family income, has access to a fully and fairly funded public education.

We have all seen the consequences of this unjust and unconstitutional funding: crumbling buildings in some districts and cutting-edge technology in others. Over crowded classrooms and underpaid educators in poor communities, while wealthier districts thrive.

In this current budget cycle, the House plan went as far as eliminating supplemental targeted assistance funding which helped ensure children living in poor urban districts, who are more likely to be Black or brown, can get the same educational opportunities as those students living in more affluent communities. This is one of our most urgent concerns. Cutting this funding would devastate school districts in Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo and Akron where there are already significant structural barriers.

The Fair School Funding Plan doesn't only benefit low-wealth districts. High wealth districts like Medina and Westerville are counting on the General Assembly to fully implement the plan in the 2026-27 budget. The Fair School Funding Plan provides all districts with the predictability and stability they need to plan for the future. Pulling the rug out from them will harm children of all backgrounds.

The Fair School Funding Plan, including Supplemental Targeted Assistance, was built on years of bipartisan work, expert input, and real data. It's grounded in what it actually costs to educate a child. It's not a guess and it's not a political compromise. It's the real cost of giving our children the education they need and deserve. Across rural, suburban, small town and urban Ohio, the formula helps all students and focuses support on those who need it the most.

Let me be clear: Removing that support is not a budget cut, it's a moral failure.

On behalf of the Ohio Conference of Branches of the NAACP, I urge you to fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan. Our children can't wait and they shouldn't have to.

Thank you.