



Senate Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony: HB 96
League of Women Voters of Ohio: Dr. Karen Leith, Advocacy Chair
Wednesday, May 28, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Dr. Karen Leith. I am currently the Advocacy Chair for the League of Women of Ohio's State Board. By training, I am a social psychologist and educator with classroom experience at every level. I'm here to urge the committee to fully phase in the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan — including updated base cost inputs — into Ohio's budget and to remove the cap on district reserves.

From the mountains of Appalachia to the banks of the Ohio River to the shores of Lake Erie, we all want the best for all Ohio's students. We all know that if Ohio is to grow economically and if its citizens are to flourish, we need to support the constitutionally mandated public school system. That is the system that covers every area of our state and accepts every student. That is the system that offers opportunity, workforce training, civic education and the building up of our small communities. That is the foundation of our democracy.

League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization with priorities of protecting the democratic process and educating voters to be engaged beyond the ballot box. Our positions are the result of in depth studies. We have supported the DeRolph case and have advocated for a constitutional plan of school funding for decades. So, when we say that the Fair School Funding Plan is the first time we have seen a framework that is constitutional, we do so as a result of years of study and review. We have advocated for its becoming law and being fully implemented from its beginning.

You have heard all of this before from us. You have received some of the research on public school populations we have gathered. In the last few weeks, we have been listening to citizens in Ohio's rural counties — hearing their stories and their concerns. These stories of what public schools mean to them have only increased our advocacy because SMALL TOWNS MATTER AND THEIR SCHOOLS ARE THEIR HEART. State funding that is constitutional, predictable and based on costs is essential not only for their schools, but for the stability and economic growth of their communities — and, ultimately, all of Ohio.



I ask you to consider my testimony and choose to support the 90% of Ohio students who attend public schools, especially those across rural Ohio. Please fully phase the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan into Ohio's budget. This includes the updated inputs and all tools needed to implement it properly. Also, eliminate the cap on district reserves so our district can be fiscally responsible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.