

Testimony by Wendy Leatherberry, Member, Beachwood Board of Education

May 28, 2025

Ohio Senate Finance Committee

My name is Wendy Leatherberry and I serve as a member of the Board of Education in Beachwood. Thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns about HB 96. I have many concerns about the impact that HB 96 would have on school districts throughout the state, including mine.

Like many, I was very hopeful when the Fair School Funding Plan was put in place years ago, as it meant that school funding would be more predictable and more fairly distributed. I urge you to include the funds necessary to meet that promise of the Fair School Funding Plan. It was such a huge step forward for the children of our state. Please do not walk away from that promise now.

Aside from the Fair School Funding Plan, I want to focus on a component of HB 96 which poses a grave risk to my district and many others. That is the limit on how much a district can carryover from one year to the next. In a state that claims Home Rule as a core value, it is truly astounding to see this Body consider placing such stringent, arbitrary limitations on what are supposed to be independent locally-operated entities.

The Beachwood City School District is proud to be one of only three public school districts in the State of Ohio to have attained a AAA Bond Rating from the credit rating agency, Moody's. We take enormous pride in this rating because it speaks to what good stewards we are of taxpayer dollars. While we are deeply committed to providing the very best education to each and every one of our students, we are also deeply committed to taking good care of the funds that our residents and businesses provide us through their tax dollars.

The provision that would arbitrarily limit carryover to 30% would put this AAA bond rating in jeopardy and would potentially even make it challenging for our treasurer/chief financial officer to certify multi-year contracts that have historically provided savings to the district. Additionally, this may make certifying multi-year collective bargaining agreements increasingly difficult.

Our ability to be careful with our spending and have substantial carryover is the reason we have been able to stretch our levies longer than expected. The provision in HB 96 would actually punish our district and others like it for being judicious with taxpayer dollars.

It is my hope and request that you will eliminate this provision in HB96 entirely. There is simply no need for the Ohio Legislature to micromanage local school districts at this level. Our communities scrutinize our activities, especially our expenditures, already, as they should. The very concept of Local Control is that each community should be able to make many determinations for itself. This is most certainly one of them. Therefore, I respectfully request that you remove any limitation on school districts relating to carryover funds.