

May 22, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Angela Dockery and I reside in Hilliard, one of the largest school districts in Ohio. We are an IEP family, and part of the 284,000+ students with disabilities in Ohio. I am extremely concerned about the state budget. This budget proposal does not include fully funding the Fair School Funding Plan with updated associated costs, it funnels public money to private schools by creating “savings accounts” that have no oversight, and thereby rubber stamps exclusion of certain groups of students by schools that have no obligation to educate them. Furthermore, it impacts the education that all students receive by allowing religious release time up to two hours a week.

I know first hand the limits of a public education both from a professional perspective and parent perspective. I also know firsthand the beauty of a public education. Public schools have only been including students with disabilities since 1975 when Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Since then, we have seen education of students move from outright exclusion prior to the Act, to segregation in separate rooms of the school, to a more recent inclusion model. Students with disabilities are entitled to inclusion with non-disabled students. Parents who choose chartered private schools or non chartered schools for their child with a disability must relinquish their child’s right to an appropriate education and Individualized Education Plan.

IDEA hasn’t been updated in a long time, but that hasn’t stopped many school districts from implementing changes that significantly increase the maximum extent that a student with disabilities is taught alongside their non-disabled peers, meaning districts have expanded the inclusion capability of their school district leading to higher rates of graduation with a standard diploma for students with disabilities.

My own school district has shown a commitment to and forward growth in educating students with disabilities. While my family’s IEP meetings have sometimes been challenging, the school district has shown its willingness to engage with and consider our parent suggestions and input into the IEP process, thereby offering education to my family that is unavailable at chartered religious and non chartered religious schools.

However, the limits of our current public education system still exist, and it is imperative you see the harm you will cause by not fully funding the Fair School Funding Plan, and see the negative impacts the loss of public funds to Educational Savings Accounts will cause. It is imperative you see the work yet to be done to ensure every student in Ohio has access to a free appropriate public education, fully funded by and embraced by the state budget. You hold the futures of these 284,000 plus students in your hands by how you choose to fund their education. What will you do?

Interested Party Witness Testimony
Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Angela Dockery

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