

May 28, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the privilege of submitting written testimony on behalf of the Springfield City School District.

My name is Bob Hill and I have been the proud superintendent of the district for over a decade. At daybreak last week, I stood outside Springfield High School as ninth-grader María—now mastering her third language, English—stepped off the bus, gripping the district-issued iPad we purchased through responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

A few steps behind her came Jayden, a tenth-grader whose individualized education plan requires a one-to-one aide, so that he can master algebraic reasoning. Both students greeted dedicated members of our administrative team, teachers, and support staff, before heading to a breakfast that they received at no cost because every child in Springfield is considered economically disadvantaged.

That 30-second snapshot of a day in our district—safe transportation, universal meals, responsive staff, and targeted academic support—is possible only because state dollars stretch far enough to meet needs that local wealth simply cannot.

Springfield is Clark County’s most diverse, highest-need district. Approximately 70% of our 7,400 students qualify for Medicaid and experience poverty; nearly one-fifth are English Learners; another one-fifth require special-education services; and 72 percent of our FY 2025 operating budget must come from the State of Ohio.

In a community where depressed property values mean a single mill generates just \$121 per pupil—less than half the yield of nearby districts—even an eight-mill levy funds scarcely one month of operations.

Unlike many suburbs, we cannot “tax our way out” of structural deficits. Instead, we protect students by maintaining reserves sufficient to bridge the six-month gap between local tax settlements and to advance-fund the federal grants that hire María’s bilingual assistant or keep Jayden’s para-professional in his classroom.

House-passed Substitute H.B. 96 dismantles this safety net. By imposing a 30-percent cash-balance cap, it triggers automatic tax rollbacks whenever district reserves exceed an

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arbitrary limit—regardless of revenue volatility—penalizing fiscal responsibility rather than curbing waste. Compounding the harm, the Fair School Funding Plan remains only partially implemented, falling short of delivering the equitable and adequate resources it promised—leaving districts like ours struggling to meet rising demands amid escalating costs for fuel, health care, and instructional materials.

Under current financial projections, Springfield City School District’s cash balance is projected to decline sharply—from \$66.2 million, or 56% of annual expenditures in the upcoming fiscal year, to a \$19.1 million deficit, equivalent to -15% of annual expenditures, by FY 2029. This downward trajectory stems from expenditures rising above \$140 million while revenues remain stagnant, creating an unsustainable fiscal gap. If unaddressed, this imbalance will have tangible and painful consequences in our schools: María’s iPad will go unreplaced, Jayden’s aide will be reassigned, and the fragile bridge that connects our students’ lived experience of poverty to their future potential will begin to fracture.

Ohio has been here before. Two decades of DeRolph litigation culminated in a constitutional promise of a “thorough and efficient” system for every child—urban, suburban, or rural. The Fair School Funding Plan enacted in 2021 was a bipartisan answer to that mandate, but it cannot succeed if we drain reserves, cap essential services, or freeze cost factors in the face of inflation. Treasurers, auditors, and the Government Finance Officers Association alike recommend reserve policies tailored to each district’s cash-flow cycle, not one-size-fits-all ceilings that convert prudence into liability.

Therefore, I respectfully urge the Senate to amend H.B. 96 as follows:

1. Remove temporary “bridge funding” and maintain the phase-in as proposed by Governor DeWine.
2. Maintain guarantees until full implementation of the FSFP is complete, including updated categorical funding.
3. Delete the 30-percent reserve cap and any automatic millage reductions.
4. Reinstate the five-year forecast requirement to ensure long-term financial transparency.
5. Increase the weighted funding for Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid and English Learners so that financial formulas match the actual cost of educating María, Jayden, and thousands like them.

These adjustments honor Article VI, Section 2 of Ohio’s Constitution and transform statutory language into lived opportunity. Our reserves are not excess; they are lifelines that advance-fund special-education aides, bridge half-year tax gaps, and shield classrooms from economic shock. Imposing blanket caps will force mid-biennium program cuts, widen opportunity gaps, and drive levy requests our community cannot bear.

Members of the Committee, Springfield's children are not statistics; they are tomorrow's licensed electricians, bilingual nurses, and software engineers—if only we sustain the scaffolding that lifts them there.

I ask you to refine Substitute H.B. 96 so that it strengthens, rather than undermines, the future of María, Jayden, and every Ohio student whose brilliance deserves an adequately and equitably funded education.

I stand ready to collaborate on any technical language necessary to achieve that goal and thank you for your unwavering commitment to Ohio's public schools.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Hill", with a stylized, cursive script.

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