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The Honorable Jerry C. Cirino  
Senator, Ohio's 18th Senate District  
1 Capitol Square, Room 127  
Columbus, OH 43215

Chairman Cirino,

On behalf of the East Central Ohio Educational Service Center, it is my pleasure to provide a few items for your consideration of House Bill 96 as it is currently written. While there are certainly many provisions of the bill that will serve both Ohio's kids and public schools, we are significantly concerned about the implications that the bill will have on school funding - particularly relating to the future of Fair School Funding as well as the proposed cap of 30% on carry-over balances.

First and foremost, Ohio's K-12 education structure relies on locally-elected school boards whose members are farmers, small business owners, nurses and residents from dozens of other backgrounds - individuals who have often lived for decades in the school community. They are best-equipped to make decisions impacting the financial position of local school districts. Generally, a "one-size-fits-all" change in education funding and regulations is often not met with the best outcomes. However, the currently proposed carry-over balance cap removes this local control from every community in Ohio. If the Ohio Senate is determined to retain a carry-over balance policy, we ask that the cap be removed and that each district be required to establish its own policy for carry-over balances that sets both minimum and maximum thresholds.

Educational Service Centers (ESCs) also play a vital role in the success of Ohio's public education system by providing essential services to districts in a cost-effective and collaborative manner. As regional partners, ESCs help stretch taxpayer dollars further while offering high-quality professional development, special education support, and administrative services that many smaller or rural districts would struggle to afford independently. As House Bill 96 is considered, it is important that the role of ESCs be clearly recognized and appropriately supported to ensure equity and access across all regions. Any changes resulting from this legislation should not inadvertently weaken the collaborative infrastructure that ESCs provide, especially as districts face increasing demands with limited resources.

Additionally, we ask that the Senate endeavor to preserve the principles embodied in the Fair School Funding plan, even if inputs cannot be fully funded. FSF is currently the most effective and efficient way for the state to determine the costs to educate students across Ohio.

Thank you for your consideration of these factors while developing Ohio's operating budget for the coming biennium.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Randy J. Lucas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Randy" and last name "Lucas" clearly legible.

Sincerely,  
Randy Lucas  
Superintendent  
East Central Ohio Educational Service Center

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