

Interested Party Testimony for House Bill 96 (Am. Sub. H. B. No. 96)
Senate Finance Committee
Thursday, May 29

Ryan Wynia, Parent
Big Walnut Local Schools

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, and members of the Finance Committee of the Ohio Senate: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ryan Wynia. My wife and I have three kids in the Big Walnut School District.

I'm here today because of my kids, because of my friends, family, and neighbors. I'm here because of education's outsized role in my life. I'm here today because what affects one of us affects all of us. I'm here because stealing from kids to build a professional sports complex is outrageous, unethical, and because it benefits your billionaire buddy donors, it is corrupt on its face. I'm testifying because my senator, Andy Brenner, and representative, Beth Lear, are MAGA sycophants on a mission to destroy public education. I'm speaking out today because my school district's Board of Education, our district's superintendent, and treasurer have failed to lead from the front in this fight for the fate of public education.

And I'm here because my community deserves every voice to be heard in defense of their future. Ohio's young people are our bright promise. And every dollar you steal from them dims that promise for their own lives and for each one of us, because our freedom to flourish depends on our collective potential. Choking out public education suffocates societies, while investing in education is one of the most predictable ways to build a society where everyone thrives.

Gleaming stadiums often rise under the promise of economic rejuvenation and civic pride. But beneath their shimmering facades lies a grim reality: More often than not, publicly funded sports palaces become monuments to misplaced priorities and stolen opportunities. Instead of delivering prosperity, stadium subsidies drain resources from schools and social services, leaving communities less resilient and on the hook to foot the bill long after the roar of the crowd fades away.

The economic claims that justify these stadium subsidies crumble under scrutiny. Studies repeatedly find negligible or negative impacts on overall economic growth. Stadiums largely shift local spending rather than generate new wealth, creating fleeting, low-wage jobs instead of sustainable economic opportunity. The Brookings Institution, the Federal Reserve, and dozens of academic economists have concluded that stadiums do not increase regional employment or per capita income and often result in long-term public debt. Not one prominent economist surveyed by the University of Chicago supported stadium subsidies as economically sound investments. Ohio's own budget director warns that the promised growth and higher tax revenues "do not occur the way sports teams claim."

Contrast that with investments in education.

Well-funded public education consistently pays dividends in higher earnings, better health, lower crime, and a more engaged citizenry. The level of school funding affects everything from report cards to incarceration rates. A 10% increase in K–12 per-pupil funding has produced a 7% increase in adult earnings and a 3% decrease in poverty. High school graduation significantly reduces incarceration rates, including by more than 3% for Black students. College graduates live an average of nearly 11 years longer than those who do not finish high school. Education improves health, reduces crime, increases civic participation, and drives innovation.

Cuts to education have the opposite effect. When states decrease school funding, test scores drop, graduation rates decline, and long-term income is suppressed. Defunding schools leads to increased taxpayer costs—nearly \$300,000 over a person's lifetime—through lower productivity, higher dependence on public assistance, and greater expenditures in the criminal justice and healthcare systems. Schools are infrastructure, every bit as crucial to a functioning society as roads and bridges.

Cutting funding for public schools casts a long shadow over the futures of our young people and their communities. Investing in public education is the most reliable pathway to prosperity, human flourishing, and thriving communities, paying out dividends generation after generation. Funneling hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars into the pockets of billionaire franchise owners is corporate welfare in its most blatant form. It is a grotesque transfer of wealth from everyday working Ohioans to its wealthiest.

There's a single outcome from cutting funding for public schools: atrophy. We collectively fall apart. Defunding education is effectively defunding democracy. It leaves us less prepared to participate, to prosper, or even care. I guess it comes down to what you consider a touchdown. Sacrificing Ohio's future to do your billionaire buddies a solid? A legacy of corruptly stealing from kids? Or fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan and continue investing in education as infrastructure and a proven path to prosperity?

Thank you.