

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee,

Sometime during an election season in the mid-1980s, though I can't recall the exact year, you would have found me and my classmates on the playground at J.F. Dulles Elementary in the Oak Hills School District performing what we called "levy dances." They were like rain dances, only instead of wishing for rain, we were hoping voters would pass a tax levy so we wouldn't lose school buses, sports, or other things we depended on.

I was only in 5th or 6th grade, but I still remember how unfair it felt to live under the constant threat of cuts.

Maybe I understood more than most kids because public education wasn't just something I experienced; it's part of my family's fabric. My grandfather helped name Oak Hills at its founding. My mother spent her career in special education, and my father served in public school administration for decades, including 21 years in Wyoming City Schools where he retired as Superintendent.

So when my husband and I were choosing where to raise our family, we picked the smaller, older house in Wyoming over the bigger, newer one elsewhere because we knew what kind of public school experience we wanted for our kids.

It was the right decision. We have had three children in Wyoming public schools: a sophomore in college, a junior in high school, and a sixth grader. Our oldest was well-prepared for college and experienced the full range of opportunities: he competed academically, toured with the orchestra, and earned medals at the state swim championship just months after playing in the Division IV state football championship. Our daughter has led her class as president, competed in varsity volleyball and softball, and just last month took first place in her event at the DECA International Career Development Conference - a competition of over 20,000 students from around the world. Our youngest has had a front row seat to what's possible and is just starting his own journey. All three have been able to explore a broad range of activities surrounded by friends who are just as diverse in their passions.

I don't share their stories to brag (okay, maybe a little), but because they demonstrate what a successful public education system can do. Their hard work is matched by a school system and community that amplify and support them: teachers who have the resources and energy to unlock opportunities, neighbors who fundraise to support extra costs, and families and local businesses who line the streets to send teams off to compete. That's what it looks like when a community invests in its children.

And I am deeply grateful that **my kids never had to dance for their education**. No child should have to.

Education is more than an economic investment, though it certainly is that. Brain drain and long-term costs of undereducation are real. But public education is also a **moral responsibility** - a belief my father carried throughout his life. Thirty years ago, many who worked at the state in education would've known him and valued his leadership. I can't speak for him now, but I can say this: he believed in the greater public good and brought together as many as he could to work towards it.

There is no question - education shapes the future of both our children and our state. But Ohio's current leadership, including the proposal from Governor DeWine and the provisions in HB 96, fails to reflect that reality. These proposals shortchange the Fair School Funding Plan. They cap community-approved funding and label it "property tax relief" - a misleading phrase that hides what this really is: state interference in locally supported public education.

Meanwhile, the state continues to siphon funds away from public schools into private voucher programs—programs that operate with minimal transparency and little public accountability. Some legislators defend this under the banner of EdChoice, echoing Milton Friedman's belief that education should function as a free market with the wealthy getting first access. In a 2005 Education Week interview, Friedman justified this approach by arguing:

"Automobiles, when they were first invented and developed, were a toy of the rich. But they ultimately were an indispensable necessity for the bulk of the population... One of the roles of the rich in society is to serve as a proving ground for new developments."

But **education is not a luxury**. It is not a toy to be tested by the rich in hopes that it trickles down. Education is a necessity. It is essential to a functioning democracy and a just society. Every child deserves access to quality instruction, athletic opportunity, and creative exploration. A thriving education system cannot be outsourced, privatized, automated, or kept behind a gate. It must be supported—fully and fairly.

Public schools are vital to Ohio. They are living, adaptive systems that flourish when given the tools they need. They are the heartbeats of our communities; built not just on test scores but on connection, engagement, and trust.

So I'm asking you, on behalf of my children, my father's legacy, and the countless families across Ohio:

- **Fund public education as required by Article VI Section 2 of Ohio's Constitution.**
- **Fully phase in the Fair School Funding Plan.**
- **Remove operational caps that punish communities for investing in their schools.**
- **Stop expanding voucher programs that drain public dollars and destabilize the schools that serve 90% of our children.**

Let's ensure that no child ever again has to dance on a playground just to keep their bus, their arts, or their team.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Sarah Williams

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