

Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding H.B. 96. For the record, I am the President of Liberty-Benton School District's Board of Education. However, I'm speaking as an individual and not in any official Board capacity.

March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1997 the Ohio school funding formula was ruled unconstitutional. It would be over 24 years (8,896 days) before the Fair School Funding Formula, proposed under H.B. 305 was passed into law. It's true that Ohio school funding is needlessly complex. However, this was a landmark achievement in that it was both constitutional and generally agreeable to all stakeholders of Ohio's public schools.

In a matter of days, H.B. 96 threw out decades of work and accomplishment based on a false narrative that schools are inefficient and failing. Worse, it attempts to invalidate and override TWO separate votes by local voters. Details are important but I must summarize.

**Invalidating Ohio Votes:** For a school tax to pass 2 votes must happen. First, voters must elect school board members that support a given tax level. Then, should a board pursue a tax, the voters must vote to pass the tax. These decisions are not permanent and voters must continually reaffirm their support or decide to make changes. The point is – these are voter decisions and a bedrock of local control. It is wholly inappropriate for the state to invalidate votes, establish central control, and tell voters whether they made good decisions.

**Ohio Schools Narrative:** In the 2023-2024 school year 85% of Ohio districts had acceptable or better performance *when judged by Ohio's own standards*. The remaining 15% **do** need to improve. But this is a success for public education by any measurement. Additionally, each district has unique financial needs. H.B. 96 attempts to paint everyone with the same brush as if Vanlue is the same as Dublin, or Dayton the same as Westerville. This is both dangerous and foolish. And I must reiterate it attempts to invalidate local control and voters legitimately expressed will.

Finally, the simple truth is that public schools educate at a lower cost (higher efficiency) than private or parochial schools. And that remains true even after accounting for the unfunded mandates where private school costs are transferred to public schools.

In closing let me say this: This bill is a mistake. I urge you to restore the original fair school funding plan and fully fund it based on current costs. Then take the next step. Identify model schools like Liberty-Benton. Work with our experts to understand why we're successful. Learn how to apply those lessons to districts that are struggling.

You've been given an amazing system built on a strong foundation. Do not tear it down.