

I am writing to you today as a deeply concerned parent and a proud resident of the Berea City School District. Our public schools are the bedrock of our community, and the proposed changes in the House version of the state budget threaten to undermine the exceptional education they provide. I urge you to reconsider these detrimental changes and prioritize the future of Ohio's public school students.

The **Fair School Funding Plan** was meticulously crafted to address Ohio's unconstitutional reliance on property taxes for school funding. It represents a vital step towards equitable education for all students. The House budget's decision to eliminate the final two years of this critical phase-in is incredibly disappointing and short-sighted. Under this version, Berea City Schools would receive only a **4.5% increase in funding instead of the 7.9%** we are slated to receive with full implementation. This reduction will directly impact our ability to maintain the high standards of education our children deserve.

I am particularly alarmed by the proposed increase in private school voucher funding by **\$500 million, while public school funding is slated to increase by only \$220 million.** This prioritization is deeply troubling when **90% of Ohio's students attend public schools.** Diverting critical resources away from the vast majority of our students undermines the very foundation of our public education system. Our public schools are open to all children, regardless of background or ability, and they deserve our full financial commitment.

House Bill 96, which proposes capping school district cash balances at 30% and redirecting any surplus as property tax relief, is a direct assault on local control and responsible financial planning. This could cost Berea City Schools an estimated **\$2 million in FY26.** Redirecting them not only undermines voter intent but also destabilizes the careful financial planning that ensures our district's long-term sustainability. Our community voted for these funds to benefit our students, and that intent must be honored.

I want to share a personal story about my son, Declyn, and what Berea City Schools mean to our family. When schools reopened after the COVID-19 pandemic, Declyn, like many students, was significantly behind. It was a challenging time, and as a parent, I was deeply concerned about his academic progress and emotional well-being. Berea City Schools immediately recognized his needs, and he was placed on an **Individualized Development Plan (IDP).**

What happened next was nothing short of remarkable. The dedicated teachers and staff worked tirelessly with Declyn. They provided him with individualized support, extra tutoring, and a nurturing environment that allowed him to thrive. In just one year, his progress was astounding. He not only caught up but began to excel, regaining his confidence and

rekindling his love for learning. This incredible improvement would not have been possible without the robust support systems and dedicated resources that our public schools provide. It is a testament to the power of committed educators and the vital role of adequate funding.

Call to Action for Legislators

I implore you, as our representative, to:

- **Do not eliminate the final phase of the Fair School Funding Plan.**
- **Do not repurpose voter-approved district cash balances for one-time property tax relief.**
- **Fully fund public schools before increasing private voucher programs.**
- **Protect local control and long-term planning by respecting district savings.**

Thank you for your time and consideration of these critical matters. Our public schools are not just buildings; they are communities of learning that shape the future of our children and our state.

Sincerely,

James Clinton