

I am writing today to testify against HB 96. As a parent of a child who attends the Berea City School District - as well as an employee of the Fairview Park City School District - I am fully in support of the Fair School Funding Plan.

The Fair School Funding Plan was created to address Ohio's unconstitutional reliance on property taxes to fund schools. The House version of the state budget removes the final two years of this phase-in. Under this version, Berea City Schools would receive only a 4.5% increase in funding instead of the 7.9% it would receive with full implementation of the plan.

It's concerning to me that the House budget increases private school voucher funding by \$500 million, while increasing public school funding by less than half of that, at \$220 million. 90% of Ohio's students attend public schools. Prioritizing vouchers diverts critical resources away from the vast majority of students who attend Ohio's public schools.

Another largely concerning part of HB 96 is that it proposes capping school district cash balances at 30% and redirecting any surplus as property tax relief. This could cost Berea City Schools approximately \$2 million in FY26. These funds are voter-approved and are already part of our five-year forecast. Redirecting them undermines voter intent and local financial planning. Berea has not asked voters for new operating funds since 2012, proving the district is a responsible steward of taxpayer money. As a resident and taxpayer, I appreciate that Berea has maintained financial stability without having to come to the ballot every time and burdening our community.

Recently, I attended Berea's third annual School Showcase with my daughter, who is finishing up her 1st grade year in the district. Seeing all of the innovation and entrepreneurship from students across the district was amazing. My daughter and her class performed a few songs, and afterward we walked around to the various tables on display. Her school librarian had several student projects at her table - the library has "Maker Friday" where students explore all sorts of STEAM-related topics. There were 3D print creations, sewing projects, pictures of activities and projects they have done during Maker Fridays throughout the school year - I was impressed and proud that she attends a school that can implement that kind of hands-on learning with its students. The Showcase also boasted the district art show, which included works from students from K-12. The talent was incredible. I'm concerned that a loss in funding will severely and negatively impact the great things the district is doing with our students in regards to innovation and the arts, as well as with our students' well-being - Berea has expanded mental health partnerships, added calming corners to K-5 classrooms, and added 6 full-time student and family support specialists.

My plea to you is this: do not eliminate the final phase of the Fair School Funding Plan. Do not repurpose voter-approved district cash balances for one-time property relief. Fully fund public schools before increasing private voucher programs. Protect local control and long-term planning by respecting district savings. See firsthand the impact of Berea's strategic investment in students by visiting the district.

I love living in the Berea district; my husband is a graduate, and we fully intend to send all three of our children through the district. I truly believe they are doing great work there and hope you will consider the negative impact HB 96 would have if passed. Thank you for your time and for your support of our students and public education.