

**Opponent Testimony for HB 96**  
**State Finance Committee**  
**May 22, 2025**

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**Superintendent - Upper Arlington School District**

Chair Senator Cirino, Vice Chair Senator Chaves, Ranking Member Senator Hicks - Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony on House Bill 96 . My name is Dr. Robert Hunt, and I am proud to serve as the superintendent of the Upper Arlington City School District. I am also a community member in Upper Arlington. Today, I am writing to oppose the transition away from the Fair Funding Model and the imposed cap on cash balances for public school districts articulated within House Bill 96 .

I have been an educator in the state of Ohio for over 30 years and a superintendent in 3 different Ohio districts for 13 years. I have experienced the roller coaster of state funding models throughout this period in time. The funding formulas in the state of Ohio have been ruled unconstitutional a number of times. But the work group that created the fair funding formula started the conversation in the right place, what it actually takes to educate a child in the state of Ohio. I commend the work group for their work. Additionally we appreciate Governor DeWine and the legislature for phasing funding this into model in the last biennium budget.

House Bill 96 calls for a bridge formula which I fear is simply a bridge back in time, a bridge to uncertainty for school districts, and a bridge that will negatively impact the education of students in the state of Ohio. Although our school district, according to initial simulations, does not suffer an immediate negative impact by this transition, this is bad for the districts throughout the state of Ohio and a step backward in the thinking around school funding.

Finally, I would like to address the proposed cap on ending cash balances. While this is being touted as “property tax relief” in Upper Arlington it does nothing more than take away funds from the school district that have already been voted upon by our community. This overrides the votes of local taxpayers which is a move away from local control.

Our community has become accustomed to and supportive of a 3-5 year levy cycle. For this to be possible school districts bring in and retain in reserve more cash at the beginning of the cycle and spend down that balance in the out years of the levy cycle. To maintain financial stability while meeting the requirements of the cap, our district will have to go back to the ballot more often creating confusion and likely voter fatigue in our community.

Lastly, these dollars also provide reserves for unforeseen circumstances and demonstrate fiscal responsibility when debt issuance is necessary. We are 1 of 6 districts in the state of Ohio that has a AAA bond rating, and this cap weakens the financial outlook putting this level of rating at risk in the future.

I would respectfully request that this committee develop a solution that preserves the fair school funding model and removes cap limitations for cash balances in school districts.

Thank you.