

May 28, 2025

To members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee:

I write as graduate of public schools, and a parent of two public school graduates from my home district of Talawanda, in Butler County, Ohio. I am a former school board member in this district so I have plenty of direct experience with trying to create budgets that help produce excellent educational opportunities while using tax-payer dollars in responsible ways.

Our district does both of these things — provide a great education for all learners, and responsibly use public dollars — very well. It does so with the lowest level of state support of any other district in Butler County, which creates hardships and challenges for our citizens who must fund a large share of our school district budget locally.

From my viewpoint, the budget contained in the Amended Substitute House Bill 96 in April is a loaded gun, pointed at Ohio public education. You have the power to alter this situation in the Senate.

As you deliberate over a proposed budget that will potentially give millions of new dollars to private schools, on top of the millions of voucher dollars you've already provided, I would remind you that these are schools which are neither transparent in their decision-making nor publicly accountable to all of their constituents no matter their identity, income, or background. I remind you that a great majority of students happily attend public schools in this state, and certainly, the majority of students from poor families also attend public schools, where they are served by excellent educators and programs provided by local districts.

Your budget, ultimately, should reflect your commitments, and your promises to Ohio families and children, in particular. Our lawmakers should, with their budget, signal to the voters that they can keep a promise.

The Fair School Funding is a bi-partisan promise to Ohio families that the legislature will allocate money to district following the formulations done to generate the cost of educating children in each Ohio district.

Keeping this promise is keeping faith with the public school districts in Ohio, who every day do the work of empowering students, and their families, to learn, grow, and achieve a good life in our state.

Keeping the faith with public school districts in Ohio is challenged by pending legislation that seeks to create additional budgetary roadblocks for treasurers and school boards. I realize that many legislators are incentivized to create property tax reform. This is the reason why House Bill 96 is still on the table, despite the testimonies of many district treasurers that this bill will harm the ability of districts to manage their funds in responsible and responsive ways.

This Ohio legislature dreamed up ways a myriad of bills to de-fund, limit, and derail the efforts of public school districts trying to educate students with excellence and accountability to citizens and taxpayers. It seeks to expand and enrich those private operators who educate the wealthiest and most privileged students, whose schools are neither transparent nor inclusive in the scope of their service.

The current Ohio budget, passed by the House, is a gun aimed at public education in our state. Don't pull the trigger.

Sincerely,

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