

Testimony

Provided to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

INTERESTED PARTY

HB 96: Creates FY 2026-2027 Operating Budget

PROVIDED BY:

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Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to share my perspective on House Bill 96 and the Fair School Funding Formula. I am a parent of two students in the Talawanda School District in Oxford, Ohio, and an alumnus of this district. I am the former President of the Parent-Teacher Group for one of our elementary schools and was co-chair of our levy campaign in 2022, a levy that we failed to pass.

The Talawanda School District is one of the best places to live in Ohio. It contains picturesque rural communities as well as one of the nation's most vibrant college towns, Oxford, home to Miami University. Our family moved from the Washington, DC area to Oxford in 2020 for the safe community and the outstanding school district. There is no place I would rather raise my family.

But I am deeply concerned that the budget passed by the Ohio House under the leadership of Speaker Matt Huffman will shortchange the children in our district and many others throughout the state. Speaker Huffman's budget is not fulfilling a promise that was made to families and kids in Ohio - the promise to finally fix how Ohio funds our public schools. I was a junior at Talawanda High School, when the Ohio Supreme Court declared that the way Ohio funded its public schools was unconstitutional, and I was the mom of a 5th and a 2nd grader when Governor DeWine signed the 2022-2023 budget implementing the Fair School Funding Plan. It took twenty-four years for the wrong to be fixed. Or so we thought.

As Senator Lang knows, Talawanda is one of the only "open districts" in Butler County, Ohio; this means we educate children who have been removed from other school districts due to various reasons and those who require specialized services, something only TSD offers in our area. Talawanda's state share of funding is 22.89% of our total revenue. The local share of our total revenue is 61.1%. In Butler County, we have the highest local share of revenue - Lakota Local School District is the next highest, and it is still 10% lower than what we pay in local taxes. Talawanda has a unique set of circumstances that make it critical for us to get our fair share from the state. Miami University is an anchor to our community and drives our regional

economy. However, as a nonprofit, it does not pay taxes on the valuable land it owns. We also have a great deal of agricultural land, which has a lower tax rate.

The Fair School Funding Formula is supposed to help move Ohio toward a fairer and predictable way of funding public education that districts could count on. Under the plan, our district would receive an additional \$560,678 in state funding over the next two years compared to the House budget, which would shortchange us by \$424,783 – money that could be spent on teachers, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, or materials. If the Ohio House budget is signed by Governor DeWine, the ten school districts in Butler County collectively will lose almost \$200 million; in total, the Ohio House's budget will shortchange Ohio's students by \$2.75 billion over the next two years.

On top of all of this, the House budget will also cap how much cash districts can keep on hand, the rainy day fund, as any financial expert would call it. That carryover cap would, for example, limit a hypothetical district with a \$100,000 budget to only have a cash reserve of \$30,000. This cap would limit Ohio school districts' ability to budget effectively. Please understand that schools need these carry overs because of a variety of reasons to include, but not limited to, planning for the uncertainty of state funding they receive every two years from the state's operating budget, desire to limit levy frequency, building maintenance and capital improvements, long term planning for purchases and anticipated increases in material and supply costs.

Now the budget is in your hands, and I am asking you, close to begging you, to make sure you keep your promise to Ohio's children. The simple fact that the House budget is proposing to cut \$2.75 billion from public education over the next two years and, all the while, dramatically increasing voucher spending, with taxpayer dollars, is disappointing and infuriating to say the least. Our public education students deserve a top-notch education. They deserve better than what we are currently providing to them.

I will leave you with this. My community is the support system for one of the gems in Ohio Public Higher Education, Miami University. Miami attracts students and faculty from across the world and puts Ohio on the map as a site of innovation. The House Budget not only threatens our school district, but it also threatens the ability of one of Ohio's great universities to attract and retain talent. Fixing this problem won't just benefit my children and their friends, but the entire state.