

Testimony from Joan Spoerl, M.A.T.
Ohio Senate Finance Committee
May 29, 2025
for Committee Meeting on May 30, 2025
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

Chair Jerry C. Cirino, Vice Chair Brian M. Chavez, and members of the Finance Committee of the Ohio Senate:

Thank you for reading my written testimony today. My name is Joan Spoerl. After studying public policy in college at the University of Chicago, I realized the importance of investments in the early childhood years for better outcomes for children, families, the economy, the workforce and society as a whole. I pursued a graduate degree in early childhood education and proceeded to teach kindergarten for ten years in a stellar hospital-based child care center in the Chicago area and then Head Start and State Pre-K in the Chicago Public Schools before moving to the Cleveland area. It was extremely difficult and extremely gratifying work.

The research has borne out my hunch that robust investments in the early years and supports for families with young children are critical and worthwhile, so I support a state budget that prioritizes those investments and continues investments in the optimization of funding for public education via the Fair School Funding plan to best serve 90% of Ohio's school-age children. I support its full long-term funding in the state budget. Such investments will pay dividends to our state's workforce and economy and make it a more attractive state for families and employers.

Groundwork Ohio has outlined the needs and the solutions that will help young children and families thrive so I ask you to fulfill their requests for funding and for restoration of so many valuable investments in Governor DeWine's proposed budget.

Also, public is public and open for all, advancing the common good. Public dollars should prioritize, advance and support the public good. When we work together to strengthen our public schools, we strengthen communities. This should be the goal of Ohio legislators.

As proud parents of a college sophomore who attended our public schools from kindergarten through high school, my husband and I know about and value quality education and we chose public, because it brings together all types of people, in our own beloved community, is open to all and striving to uplift all and excel despite difficult odds. We care about all the children in our community and know how important it is that there be well-supported public schools available to all when they need them.

My parents sent my older siblings to parochial school and that was their choice, but they would never have expected the government to fund that choice. They always supported our local public schools and were glad they were available for me. Vouchers mostly fund students already in private schools and research has verified that there is learning loss suffered by kids who use a voucher to leave public school. Vouchers are not so much about parent choice but rather the school's choice to serve whomever they choose.

Strong support of public education is one of Ohio legislators' primary responsibilities as outlined in the Ohio Constitution. Also, given that approximately 90% of school-age children in Ohio attend public schools, they should be the priority.

I share our founding fathers' convictions about education's critical place in elevating humanity and the common good, upholding our democracy, and that it should be the highest priority of government. I share their high aspirations and vision of a system so grand that, in John Adams words, "it is unknown to any other people ancient or modern" and "that knowledge must become so general as to raise the lower ranks of Society to the higher."

In 1851, the Ohioans who wrote about education in the state Constitution intended to "see a system of schools as perfect as could be devised, and to see it improve so as to keep pace with the most rapid progress of the most rapid element of our social or political constitution."

Many years have passed since 1851 but it's never too late for you to demonstrate your commitment to educational excellence, to the founding fathers' vision, to our future economy and workforce, and to the oath you swore to the Constitution.

The legislature is constitutionally mandated to provide adequate and equitable funding so every student in every public school district has the benefit of a sound education regardless of the community's capacity to fund its public schools. Such a constitutional imperative is the legislature's first and dominant duty. Rather than divert money to private schools, the legislature should be working to invest robustly in public schools.

The bipartisan Fair School Funding plan was thoughtfully crafted over years and deserves your support.

Expanding the funding for vouchers is fiscally irresponsible, as inefficient as one could possibly imagine and does not support the common good. Private is private and exclusive. Tax dollars should not be directed towards vouchers for private or religious school students. Parents have choices and it should be their choice to seek and fund the private school option. Similarly, if they don't like their public recreational facilities or don't want to interact with other community members there, they can join a private club or pool but shouldn't expect taxpayers to fund that choice.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to boast that Ohio has the best early childhood investments and public schools in the nation no matter what the community in which they're located? That would be a worthy goal towards which to strive.