

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and other members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you very much for your time, and for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Ben Ziff, I am the Mobility Coordinator at Hocking Athens Perry Community Action, a non-profit organization committed to empowering individuals and promoting self-sufficiency. In line with this mission, HAPCAP operates public transportation systems in Athens and Hocking Counties, provides statewide intercity bus service connecting many of Ohio's rural communities to its urban centers, and runs a Mobility Management program of which I am the head. I have been to the Statehouse multiple times to preach the good word of rural public transit, and I am here today to do that again.

Funding cuts seem to be inevitable these days. I think most of us understand the reality of the world we live and work in, but it doesn't make it any easier to think about, or worse yet, receive news of. The Mobility Management program for the state of Ohio, run through ODOT, is a critical component of the public transportation world, providing insight to providers, legislators such as yourselves, and most importantly, the citizenry of Ohio. As Mobility Managers, we exist to advocate for those who may not be able to advocate for themselves, to identify gaps in public transit, to increase the currently available public transit, and to teach people how to use public transit. In many of the rural communities that we work in around the state, and from my own experience, especially down in Athens and Hocking Counties, many people have never utilized public transportation. Not because they don't need it or because it wouldn't benefit them; it is often because of the intimidating nature of trying something that seems so incredibly foreign. Part of our job is helping them feel comfortable with this option, and providing them a sort of "buddy system" to make the whole process easier.

I won't lie to you, the tone of this testimony is going to take a drastic turn right here, right now. When I started writing this, it was my intention to come before you Thursday morning, and ask that you do not consider any cuts to public transportation funding. I, and many of my colleagues around the state have been waiting with baited breath for HB96 to be published, to determine if there were any GRF cuts to transportation. Having read it, we all could let out a collective sigh of relief. There are none. And not only that, but the entire section on the school bussing provision has been removed.

Thanks, are definitely in order. It is with a lighter heart, that I will head in to work tomorrow morning. Public Transportation and Mobility Management are essential services here in Ohio, and through your significant efforts and time, you have helped preserve them. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I and my colleagues all greatly appreciate the work you do every day, to make Ohio a better place for everyone.

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