

**Finance Committee
Ohio Senate
House Bill 96**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96.

My name is Kristy Meyer. I am a proud graduate of Westerville City Schools. My husband and I are now raising our two children in the district, and I'm also the aunt of four students attending Westerville schools. I currently serve as the President of the Westerville City Schools Board of Education—a role I take on with deep pride and serious responsibility.

We love the Westerville City School District, a public school district. And we're not alone—nearly 90% of Ohio families choose public education because they know that strong public schools are not just about academics. They are the foundation of a healthy community and a thriving local economy. Public schools prepare the workforce, attract businesses, stabilize property values, and strengthen neighborhoods.

But our ability to deliver on that mission is being threatened.

Funding Equity and the Fair School Funding Plan

We appreciate that the Senate proposal continues the Fair School Funding Plan and maintains funding guarantees over the biennium. These are important steps.

However, the current simulations for school funding show Westerville City Schools being essentially flat-funded, assuming no enrollment changes from FY 2025 to FY 2026 or FY 2027. Even under this status-quo scenario, **our district is projected to lose approximately \$213,488 in FY 2026**, with no increase in FY 2027. At a time when inflation continues to rise and student needs are growing, flat funding equates to a cut.

We have already been underfunded by \$29.1 million since 2021, receiving just \$3,000 per student—the same amount as four years ago. Meanwhile, non-public school students receive between \$6,000 and \$8,000 per student, in addition to other publicly funded services, further widening the funding gap. This disparity unfairly penalizes the families—like mine—who choose public schools.

Special education is particularly impacted. With 16% of our students requiring specialized support, we are tasked with delivering smaller class sizes, more staff, and critical services—needs that are both essential and expensive. When the state fails to adequately fund these services, it puts our most vulnerable students at risk.

We therefore urge you to:

- **Fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan using FY 2025 and 2026 cost inputs for FY 2026 and FY 2027, respectively; and,**
- **Update special education funding based on completed studies.**

Local Fiscal Responsibility and the 50% Clawback

I also want to speak to the proposed requirement that school districts with a general fund carry-over balance exceeding 50% face forced tax rate reductions unless those funds are used within three years. As someone who manages my household and business finances, I know it is fiscally responsible to maintain reserves for emergencies and future capital costs. That's exactly what we do in our district—plan ahead to cover aging HVAC systems, walk-in coolers, and security upgrades.

Reducing a district's funding simply because they have followed sound fiscal practices undermines local control and penalizes good governance. I strongly urge you to remove the 50% clawback language from HB 96.

Public Dollars Should Stay in Public Schools

Additionally, we ask that you remove the requirements that public districts provide transportation and services to non-public school students. These mandates divert resources from the 90% of families who rely on public schools and add financial burdens without corresponding benefits.

And despite claims to the contrary, private education is not cheaper. For example, tuition at The Wellington School in Columbus ranges from \$22,500 to over \$33,000 per student annually. Public schools operate far more efficiently while serving **all** children, regardless of ability, income, or background - they do not and cannot turn away students in their district as a private school can and does.

Levy Restrictions Harm Local Decision-Making

The proposed levy restrictions beginning in 2026 severely limit the ability of locally elected boards to respond to community needs. Banning emergency levies and adding punitive language about fund balances on the ballot undermines public trust and the flexibility districts need to plan for the future. Local voters and local leaders—not state mandates—should decide how to invest in their schools.

Conclusion & Bigger Picture

When we underfund public education, we don't just harm students—we weaken entire communities. Strong public schools attract families, support local businesses, and prepare future workers and leaders. They are a proven driver of economic growth and civic engagement.

In Westerville, we stretch every dollar to offer safe, welcoming, student-centered learning that prepares our kids for success. But we cannot keep doing more with less. The decisions made in

this budget will determine whether districts like ours can continue to serve students well—and whether Ohio's students can compete for good paying jobs and Ohio can continue to thrive.

I, therefore, respectfully urge this Committee to:

- **Fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan** with FY 2025 and 2026 cost inputs for FY 2026 and FY 2027 respectively;
- **Update and fully fund special education** based on completed cost studies;
- **Remove the 50% clawback provision** that penalizes prudent financial planning;
- **Eliminate mandates requiring public schools to subsidize private education**; and
- **Oppose restrictive levy language** that limits local control and voter engagement.

Public education is the backbone of our communities and our economy. Let's fund it accordingly.

Lastly, I speak to you not just as a board member, but as a mom. I worry deeply about what the future holds for my children—and for all children in Ohio—if this bill is not changed to truly and fairly fund public education.

My daughter, wise beyond her years, recently asked me with genuine confusion, *"Who would be against kids' education—my education?"* It's a question no parent should ever have to answer. And yet, it's one I couldn't answer honestly without heartbreak.

As you continue your deliberations, I ask you to hold onto this truth: nearly 90% of Ohio's children depend on our public schools. They are counting on you to invest in them the way previous generations invested in us.

Please don't let them down. Give them the chance to thrive. Give them the opportunity to reach their full potential. They deserve nothing less.

Thank you again for your time and the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.