

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera and members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Amanda Russ Daquelente, and I am a teacher at Howland High School in Warren, Ohio. I stand here before you today on behalf of my students and all Ohio schoolchildren to urge you to amend HB 49 to increase state funding to public schools.

I graduated from Howland High School in 1998, and I consider it an honor to carry on the "tradition of excellence" in education at my alma mater. Many things have changed since I was a student, but others remain the same. Our school mascot, the tiger, still watches over us from a larger-than-life mural in our gymnasium, our library is still the best place on campus to get lost in a good book, and I continue to learn something new every day. I've enjoyed working with many outstanding educators and administrators over the past 20 years, and I can say without a shadow of doubt that my students are the best teachers I've ever had. One major change that disheartens me is the reduced amount of state funding for public education, and I am here today to share how those budgetary restrictions have negatively impacted students in the Howland Local School District.

The impact of Governor Kasich's previous budget cuts still reverberate through the halls of our schools today. To their credit, our school board and superintendent maximized state funding to the best of their ability. We reconfigured our school district and reconciled ourselves to higher class sizes and less time for one-on-one instruction when we lost teachers to attrition. We worked diligently to adopt the Common Core curriculum despite the high costs of lost instructional time, expensive tech equipment, and the frustration of piloting two new standardized tests. We consolidated busing routes to save on fuel and repair costs, and as a result, many of our elementary students endure hour-long bus rides and our middle school students ride now the bus to school with 18-year-olds.

Our music, art, and physical fitness course offerings have been greatly reduced, and we were forced to pass a portion of the costs for our athletic programs and extracurricular activities on to our parents, hardworking Ohioans who are already struggling to make ends meet. According our last school report card, the amount of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch soared to 30%, which is higher now than it was during the recession. In addition to decreased funds, we are struggling to fund career-technical education, College Credit Plus, and SB140 courses, programs that have been mandated by state legislation but are not funded by the past or current budget proposal. Consider this in conjunction with the million dollar loss that our district is projected to face each year due to elimination of the Tangible Personal Property tax, and it is easy to see why the current amount funding allocated to public schools in HB 49 is grossly inadequate.

Another truth is also evident. All of us, Republicans and Democrats alike, understand that receiving a high quality education is crucial for Ohio children to succeed, which brings us to the question-at-hand: How do we find a fiscally responsible way to fund education in Ohio? The answer is today as it has always been. Dollar for dollar, investment in public education yields a much higher return than an investment in charter schools and e-schools. Public schools are subject to 180 more regulations than the alternative, which means that there is greater scrutiny, accountability, and transparency when it comes to how tax dollars are spent. Over the past ten years, our district has lost \$800,000 per year to failing charter schools and e-schools that waste 2 mils of tax dollars per year in our township alone. HB 49 appropriates \$38.4 million dollars to the EdChoice Voucher program in 2017 and \$47.7 million dollars in 2018. My solution is simple and cost effective: If you we shift state funding in the existing budget toward public education, we will save money and ensure cost-effective, high quality education for Ohio's students.

For many of us, our first introduction to democracy was in a public school, for it was here that we learned to celebrate our differences as our strengths and to view obstacles as opportunities for growth instead of excuses for stagnancy. As adults, we can look back on these experiences to find common ground for progress. It is in the best interest of my students, and thousands of other students across the state of Ohio, that I implore you to consider my testimony and vote NO on HB 49 unless adequate funding is allocated to public schools.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.