

Chairperson Smith and Ranking Member Sera, my name is Jared Gardner, I am an educator and a parent of two boys, one of whom is now a sophomore at Ohio State and the other a sophomore at Metro Early College High School, a remarkable state public school here in Columbus. The proposed income tax cuts take away money desperately needed for our schools—leaving only a 1% increase that won't even keep up with inflation at a time when our young people are in need of vastly improved resources to make sure they have the range of skills and support they will need to thrive in an economy that is changing in ways few of us can predict. I come before you today as to ask that you consider the long term costs of the proposed budget on the future of our State.

Shortly before I returned to my native city of Columbus in 1998, the Ohio Supreme Court declared Ohio's system of funding public education based on property taxes was unconstitutional, and charged the legislature with creating a more equitable system. Twenty years later that has not happened. Instead, the State has continued to pass on the responsibilities for funding public education on to homeowners—such that my family's real estate taxes have gone up 150% since 2003. Let me be clear, I am not here to complain about this increase (impressive though it is). But it is evidence that the broken and unconstitutional system we found here in 1998 has only gotten worse, offloading more and more of the costs of funding public education from the state onto the homeowner.

And now the new budget proposes further cuts to state income taxes and a “flattening” of the tax code that will disproportionately benefit the wealthy. And once again the revenue lost through income tax reductions will be offset through increases to sales and other individual taxes that offset the revenue once supplied by our wealthiest citizens onto the backs of the working- and middle-class taxpayers. And of course my family can expect yet another increase on the real estate taxes for our modest 1800 square-foot Clintonville home, taxes which already top \$7000.

Surely it is clear by now that this does not work. We have had years of income tax reductions for the wealthiest Ohioans under this administration, and yet the Governor comes to us now and tells us it is time for belt-tightening. Despite promises to the contrary and years to put it to the test, tax cuts for the wealthy has not kicked Ohio's economy into gear. What *has* happened under this current administration and the budget priorities that the legislature and the Governor have embraced is that our public school system—once one of the very best in the country, has fallen considerably, from 5<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> in national rankings.

We have spent a lot of time testing the old theory that tax cuts lead to jobs which leads to a stronger economy and a brighter future for our young people. It hasn't proved true. This article of faith has failed our students, our schools, and our communities. Maybe it is time to consider what countries all over the world have known for a long time—and what we used to know here in Ohio when we led the nation: investing in the education of our young people will repay itself many times over in a stronger, smarter, more nimble workforce, safer communities free from crime and addiction and related epidemics of despair.

Ohio was a pioneer in the public school movement in the United States, adopting and funding public schools only three years after achieving statehood—and only 2 years after the very first modern public school was established in Boston in 1821. This commitment to public education

made us one of the most literate states in the country in the nineteenth century, as public education brought knowledge and innovation to small cities and towns in our fast-growing state. It is surely no coincidence that this commitment led to an Ohio that was by the end of the nineteenth century the envy of the world, generating inventors and business pioneers like Charles Kettering, artists and writers like George Bellows, at a rate unthinkable for a state so young. It was investing in education made the state great. And it is investing in education that will make us the envy of the world once again.

I love this state and I love the young people of Ohio, who, I have worked with for nearly 20 years now as a university professor at Ohio State. They are remarkable, courageous, and fiercely smart. But they are not as well-prepared by their K-12 as they need to be, and they know it. This is true whether they are coming from small towns or big cities. They want to lead and they have the skills to navigate us through the obstacles and to the opportunities that are in front of us. But we are asking them to do it with one arm tied behind their backs because of our loss of faith in education as the engine of prosperity and innovation. Now is the time to do better for them and for all of Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to the House Finance Committee today.

Jared Gardner  
70 Erie Road  
Columbus, OH 43214