

HB 49 Testimony
Melcie Wells, Treasurer
Warren Local School District
June 1, 2017

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to offer testimony on HB 49. My name is Melcie Wells, and I am the treasurer of Warren Local School District – a rural school district in Southeast Ohio. Warren Local buses travel more than 3,000 miles per day, the distance to Albuquerque, New Mexico and back every day. We have 29 bus routes covering almost 200 square miles. The state average is less than 69 square miles and less than 12 bus routes per school district. Last year, our transportation costs accounted for 9% of our General Fund expenditures. Approximately \$2 million dollars are spent annually to transport our children to and from school each day.

In the current budget, the General Assembly graciously supported a transportation supplement for districts whose rider density (i.e. the number of students per square mile of the district) is below 50. This calculation is based on the positive difference between 50 and the district rider density multiplied by the per mile based funding of the district times 0.55.

This supplement was a huge asset in offsetting the many costs of transportation and meeting the needs of our students. We encourage you to continue this supplement so that we can continue to use these funds for our transportation program. It is imperative that this supplement be continued and that it be counted outside the formula and NOT be tied to a state share index. The current proposal puts the supplement INSIDE the formula, but again, I respectfully request that you move the supplement OUTSIDE the formula. This action will MOST benefit children in high poverty, high transportation expenditure districts.

Another concern is bus purchasing. We recently purchased two conventional 72 passenger bus for \$93,500 each. These costs are a reality, and we have seen continual increases in these costs over the last 10 years. Each year, buses get more expensive, and it is obvious that districts need assistance in the form of bus purchase funding to be able to replace old, worn out buses. The highest mileage bus we have right now has over 260,000 miles on it and is used each and every day to transport children. Our oldest bus is over 21 years old and the average age of our fleet is 10 years old. We run 28 regular buses and 1 special needs buses each day for a total of 29 buses running dual routes. Obviously, we must be able to develop a replacement cycle for buses so that we can maintain a safe, efficient transportation program for our children. Reinstating bus purchase funds would go a long way in helping to reduce the financial strains being placed on districts.

In conclusion, it is important to understand the impact that transportation has on our district as well as all rural and small town districts. Transportation is a necessity and integral part of the education of students. I hope you will consider keeping our transportation supplement in place OUTSIDE the formula and NOT tie it to a state share index. I also hope you will find a way to provide bus purchase money for our high mileage districts. This would relieve a lot of the stress on our budgets so that we can place more funds directly into the classroom.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today, and I would be happy to respond to questions at the pleasure of the chair.