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**Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
House Bill 110 - Regarding K-12 School Funding
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Good afternoon Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony about the state operating budget, specifically the Fair School Funding Plan now incorporated in substitute House Bill (H.B.) 110. My name is Renee Murphy. I am an attorney at Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE). We are a non-profit regional law firm that provides free legal assistance in civil matters in 32 counties in Western Ohio. We help individuals and groups living on low incomes achieve self-reliance, equal justice and economic opportunity.

Specifically, I manage our Education practice group. We are attorneys and paralegals who believe just and equitable education can help children living on low incomes achieve what they are striving for: to learn, graduate, and have a good life and job in the future. We work with parents and caregivers to advocate for quality education for their children – children in rural and urban disinvested areas, children with disabilities, children who are homeless, and children learning English. It is because of our experiences assisting those parents that ABLE supports the Fair School Funding Plan.

All children need and deserve an education that gives them equal opportunity to succeed in life. With its increased investment in each child, especially in students living in economic disadvantage, the Fair School Funding Plan moves Ohio to our promise of a “thorough and efficient system of common schools.”ⁱ The investment that the Fair School Funding Plan makes is not just for now, but an investment in the future. Research shows that children in low-income families and communities have more needs, which schools must meet for them to achieve to their potential.ⁱⁱ Many years of research shows that it is worth it to meet those needs. Increased monetary investment in education, particularly in low-income children, is associated with higher academic achievement, increased graduation rates, increased entry into college, higher wages, and reduced poverty in adulthood.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our experiences in schools throughout West Central and Northwest Ohio show that Ohio needs to make these investments in children and their schools. We know that some of the school districts where our clients live struggle with low property tax bases. We see disparities in what schools can provide in our 32-county service area. As two examples, Dayton Public Schools and Eaton Community Schools in Preble County, their school Report Card details show them falling behind in providing school counselors, school social workers,

speech-language therapists, and occupational or physical therapists.^{iv} But in some well-resourced districts, the teacher, counselor, therapists, and psychologist staffing ratios meet or exceed state averages.

Because schools do not have enough resources, our clients struggle to get their children the services they need and are entitled to. Children with disabilities need specialized instruction and, depending on their needs, services like speech-language therapy, counseling, occupational therapy, or nursing services.^v Children learning English need trained Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, and may need extra instructional hours or interpretation to help understand assignments. Instead of the full array of classroom supports, effective methodologies, and qualified personnel that the laws mandate, schools provide much more limited supports.

One example of the struggle is that multiple clients over the years have encountered difficulties getting appropriately trained paraprofessional aides for their children with significant physical or behavioral needs. For these children, a consistent, trained aide can significantly impact learning. Sadly, the children often have aides who do not know how to help them or often see substitutes unfamiliar with their needs, harming their progress. Different school districts have explained that their budgets cannot afford to pay paraprofessionals much more than minimum wages, so paraprofessionals leave for other jobs. As another example, a district's budget does not allow hiring enough speech-language therapists, who can quickly seek higher-paying positions in the health care sector. That has meant that children go without the weekly therapy they need. And in one high-poverty middle school, school budgets allowed for a school counselor for the first time only two years ago, meaning that hundreds of students had no counselor to turn to in times of stress and trauma for years.

The Fair School Funding Plan will help schools have resources to provide what children need. The increase in funding for children with economic disadvantage will help schools with high poverty provide wrap-around services. Increased average state base funding, including a student wellness component for school counselors, will allow schools to get closer to the recommended ratio of teachers and other professionals. The special education and English Learner categorical funding in the plan moves to percentage weights, which will ensure that schools can keep up with inflation cost increases. We understand that the Fair School Funding Plan, as in substitute H.B.110, has some phase-ins. The goal should be to increase funding as soon as possible to ensure a thorough and efficient system of common schools for all children. This overhaul of school funding for adequacy and equity is twenty years overdue and part of the great promise to our citizens of a society where they can succeed no matter their zip code or income.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of the Fair School Funding Plan.

ⁱ Ohio Constitution, Article VI.02.

ⁱⁱ Higher child need related to lower family income is related to many factors, including the chronic stress on families living dollar to dollar, food insecurity, higher incidence of disability and health conditions, more prevalent adverse childhood experiences, and less access to enrichment activities. See, e.g., Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, ch. 2. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Available at:

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109074/chapters/How-Poverty-Affects-Behavior-and-Academic-Performance.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Jackson, C. K. and Mackevicius, C. (February 2021, rev. March 2021). *The Distribution of School Spending Impacts*, NBER Working Paper No. 28517. Washington, DC: National Bureau of Economic Research, available at https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28517/revisions/w28517.rev0.pdf.

Baker, B. D. (2018). *How money matters for schools* (research brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Jackson, C.K., Johnson, R., Persico, C. (2016). The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Economic Outcomes: Evidence from School Finance Reforms, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 131, Issue 1, 157–218.

^{iv} Dayton: <https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/district/detail/043844> Eaton:

<https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/district/detail/043935>

^v Children with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate education under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and/or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. English Learners and their families are entitled to appropriate services to equally access their education under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act.