

Testimony on HB110 (Appropriations for FY 2022-23 Budget)
Submitted to the Ohio Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee,
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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, I am writing to urge you to pass, implement and fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan in HB110.

This plan is urgently needed in communities like Cleveland Heights-University Heights where I live, volunteer and send my children to public school.

Our district relies disproportionately on residential property taxes as a funding base as we have little industry or commercial tax base upon which to rely. The heavy burden on homeowners has made our community a tough sell to potential homebuyers despite the many other unique benefits we offer. The toll taken by frequent levies has reached a breaking point.

I've been volunteering to pass CH-UH school levies and bond issues for nearly 15 years, working on my first campaign when my eldest son was still in preschool. Most recently, I chaired back-to-back levies in 2020, one in the Primary Election that lost by 700 votes and one in the General that won by less than half of one percent of the votes cast.

Our committee raised nearly \$120,000 to run these two campaigns. We spent countless hours working to convince voters, we engaged many hundreds of volunteers over a period of 11 months. And I think that's a waste ... a waste of finances, a waste of human capital, a waste of passion and energy and ideas. Just imagine what we could have accomplished in our schools if we had spent that money, time, energy and passion working with our students instead? What if the hundreds of community residents who went door to door dropping literature instead used those three or four hours to read aloud with students? What if the money we raised was used on home libraries and special programming instead of yard signs and mailers?

Instead, we are forced to engage in a brutal and expensive public battle every few years just to secure the most basic funding necessary to educate our community's children. We are forced to do this by a funding system that is inherently broken. It is unconstitutional, unsustainable and unfair. We NEED the General Assembly to fix this. Our schools, which are far from "failing," are forced to give away nearly 45% of the dollars we receive from the State of Ohio to EdChoice vouchers. This is bleeding our district dry and pitting neighbor against neighbor.

My own children notice which houses display anti-levy signs in their yards and they take those signs personally: as an affront against them and their classmates and teachers, as proof that those anti-levy neighbors – who they may once have considered friends – don't care about their education, their futures. That they are not "worth it." It is a horrible lesson for children to have to learn. And yet they are subjected to it every few years. Because of a broken system.

They learn another horrible lesson as well and that's thanks to deduction funding for EdChoice vouchers. They see dollars that were intended for their schools, their teachers, their educational pursuits taken away as punishment and given to other schools. Public dollars sent to private institutions, who aren't held to the same standards of accountability, who aren't judged and ranked and punished by the media and by the State, who don't have to welcome and educate every child regardless of background or ability. My children and their peers are forced to learn the harshest lessons about the inherent unfairness of this system. And they are forced to pay the price.

But YOU can fix this. You have the power – and indeed you have the responsibility – to fix this. Representatives Cupp and Patterson spent years creating the Fair School Funding Plan and it is the best, most efficient and most effective way for the Ohio General Assembly to live up to its constitutional mandate to provide our State's children with a fair and thorough public education. This is your duty as Senators. Continuing to shirk that duty is unconscionable.

You have the opportunity right now, at long last, to fulfill your responsibility. As Dr. King said, "The time is always right to do what is right."

Thank you for this opportunity. And thank you for doing the right thing for Ohio's children.