

Testimony on HB110 (Appropriations for FY 2022-23 Budget)
Submitted to the Ohio Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee,
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by Joan Spoerl, M.A.T., 3121 Berkshire Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

Chairman Brenner, Vice chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Fair School Funding Plan in HB110.

My name is Joan Spoerl. I am a proud resident of Cleveland Heights and parent of a 10th grader at Heights High School who has attended our public schools since kindergarten. My husband and I attended public schools and between us have received undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate education at Stanford University, Harvard University, the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Northwestern University and Tufts University.

I don't say this to be boastful, but simply to verify that we know about and value quality education and share our founding fathers' convictions about education's critical place in elevating humanity and the common good, upholding our democracy, and that it should be the highest priority of government, free of political influence. We share their high aspirations and vision of a system so grand that, in John Adams words, "it is unknown to any other people ancient or modern" and "that knowledge must become so general as to raise the lower ranks of Society to the higher."

I want to express my thanks to all involved in providing this long sought, wonderful opportunity for you to fulfill the founders' vision and the oath you swore to the Ohio Constitution, and to the vast majority of Ohio's children when you pass and fund this well-researched, well-crafted and well-vetted legislation made in, by and for Ohioans.

I entered the field of early childhood education 30 years ago after studying public policy in college. I recognized then what research and my own experience have borne out – that generous investments in the continuum of human development from the earliest years and into adulthood pay immense dividends down the line.

On the other hand, in Ohio, we see how people and communities pay a price when government fails to invest as fairly and robustly as the founders intended.

In recent decades, our local public school system hasn't received the dependable, consistent and robust financial government support the founders intended. Some people told us we shouldn't send our child to the public schools but we are pleased with our choice. As a family, we support and work towards the founders' vision of a common public system that brings together all types of people, in our own beloved racially and socio-economically diverse public school community, open to and uplifting all and striving to excel despite difficult odds.

When I listened to testimony relating to state education policies last February, I was struck by the oft-repeated themes from public school supporters from every kind of community in Ohio - small, medium, large, rural and urban. Rural community members described their public schools as the heart or center of their community. Many voiced pride about how their public schools welcome and serve all who need

them, turn away no one, weaving together all kinds of children and families, forming a beautiful tapestry of community.

But I also learned that my community isn't unique in finding its beautiful fabric too often weakened or rent by the state's current funding model and other education policies. I heard about the divisions created in all kinds of communities, by the need for levy campaigns to simply keep up with inflation *and* the unfortunate consequences of budget cuts when those levies fail. I also heard both Republican and Democratic legislators and citizens testify that the state report card is deeply flawed and has actually harmed children and communities who need and deserve the state's support and investment.

The legislature is constitutionally mandated to provide adequate and equitable funding so every student in every public school district has the benefit of a sound education regardless of the community's capacity to fund its public schools. Such a constitutional imperative is your first and dominant duty. Instead of being supported by the state, our schools face the awful dilemma of cutting the budget and compromising the well-being of the children they serve or asking for more dollars from local property owners, many struggling themselves, just to keep pace with inflation.

You can end this dilemma and strengthen Ohio communities and the future workforce. Just think of how public schools and the families they serve can thrive with fair and predictable funding. They can plan, build and grow, free from the uncertainties and inefficiencies of the current model. The state can collaborate with local school communities to explore and enact the best educational practices.

Funding public education fairly is one of your primary constitutional responsibilities. You have the opportunity right now, at long last, to fulfill that responsibility. As Dr. King said, "The time is always right to do what is right."

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.