

## HB 49 Testimony

June 6, 2017

Ira Wentworth

### Indian Valley Local School District Superintendent

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 Ira Wentworth, and I am the superintendent of Indian Valley Local Schools located in eastern Ohio's Tuscarawas County. Indian Valley is a long, narrow school district. For those familiar with Ohio geography, we touch Cambridge City Schools on our southern tip and Tuscarawas Valley Schools located in the Bolivar/Zoar area on our northernmost tip. We have 22 bus routes that travel almost 1,700 miles per day and cover approximately 125 square miles.

Indian Valley transportation costs account for over 7% of our General Fund expenditures. Approximately \$1.2 million dollars are spent annually to transport our children to and from school each day.

In the current budget, the General Assembly graciously supported for districts with low rider density a transportation supplement, which is OUTSIDE the formula. This allows us to invest in programs and resources that support student learning and address seriously college and career readiness as exemplified by:

- Summer reading instruction for struggling readers in grades K-3.
- A new high school computer science program set to launch in 2017-2018.
- A *Class of 2017* that boasts a 95% graduation rate with 87% of its students having specific plans of going to college, attending a trade school or adult ed program, directly entering the workforce, or enlisting in the military.

The transportation supplement, in its current form, is a huge asset in offsetting the expense of getting students to and from school. It allows us to use education dollars for education purposes. Placing transportation dollars INSIDE the formula will result in a loss of educational opportunities for our students. Our students should not lose opportunities to learn and prepare for the career of their choice because they live in a low population-density region.

I ask the transportation supplement be continued in its current form so we can use these funds to get our students to and from the schoolhouse door. It is imperative that this supplement be continued 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 benefit many children in districts such as ours: low population-density districts, with high poverty and high transportation expenditures.

Another concern is bus purchasing. Our Board of Education recently approved the purchase of two conventional 72 passenger buses for \$163,000. Allow me to put this in perspective. One-mill of property tax in our district generates \$195,000. Thus, each year Indian Valley devotes almost one-mill's worth of property tax for the purchase of two school buses.

Veteran members of our Board recall the days when bus purchases were trimmed from two, to one per year. The result was an aging fleet that did not meet the transportation needs of the district, and it took several years to recoup a reliable fleet. Even with the purchase of two buses annually, our highest mileage bus has over 225,000 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 8.4 years old. The cost of buses only goes up each year. Reinstating bus purchase funds would go a long way in helping to reduce the financial strains being placed on districts.

In conclusion, 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 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. Indian Valley serves as an example that your investment in education is put to good use.

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.