



Ohio Senate
Ways and Means Committee
HB 124
June 7, 2017

Testimony by Mary Beth Freeman, Superintendent, Delaware Area Career Center

Chairman Ecklund, Vice-Chair Terhar and Ranking Minority Leader Williams, and Members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I am Mary Beth Freeman, Superintendent of the Delaware Area Career Center (DACC), a joint vocational school district (JVSD) located in Delaware County. DACC serves the four Delaware County school districts; Big Walnut, Buckeye Valley, Delaware City and Olentangy Local, which are taxing districts within our Career-Technical Planning District (CTPD). Buckeye Valley has several households that stretch into Marion, Morrow and Union counties. Olentangy has several homes that stretch into Franklin County. In addition to the four Delaware county districts, Worthington City Schools is a contract district within our CTPD, and we serve, through open enrollment, numerous students from Westerville, the Ohio School for the Deaf, and several other districts. I am currently finishing my ninth (9th) year as Superintendent at DACC. Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of HB 124.

In 2001 DACC first placed a 1.7 mill levy on the ballot. This levy was renewed in 2005 for 10 years. Keeping our 10 year promise, DACC placed a 1.7 mill renewal levy on the November 2015 ballot. It passed by 10,644 votes or 61%. In December 2016, over a year after I received a certified letter from the county, I learned that because of a mistake made by the Delaware County Board of Elections, through no fault of DACC, we would not be collecting any tax money from the 1.7 mill renewal levy beginning in January 2017. The reason for this was because the Delaware County Board of Elections did not put the ballot language on the ballot of 1026 voters who reside in the following contiguous counties: Franklin, Marion, Morrow and Union counties.

I would like to add that JVSDs do not have inside millage like our associate districts.

The levy expired in December 2015. Since real estate taxes are collected in arrears, calendar year 2016 was the last year of real estate revenue from the levy. January 2017 was the first real estate tax bill in 15 years that did not include the 1.7 mill combination levy. We are not collecting on the levy at this moment and this has resulted in a net loss of approximately \$4.4M annually. As a result of our decision to undertake the first performance audit as a JVSD in Ohio and the subsequent spending reductions we implemented as recommended by the audit, we were able to position the district to fund the building project provided the levy was renewed.

I would like to re-emphasize how DACC has strategically made decisions to position ourselves to provide the many great opportunities for students. We continue to manage our costs and maintain quality programming for our students. Because we are not collecting on this levy, non-instructional cuts are being made where possible and our \$45M construction project will soon come to a halt. Although we can sustain instruction for a short time, we cannot cut our way out of this situation.

The support of HB 124 and the approval of this levy is important for several reasons. First, and most importantly, we will be unable to complete our construction project, which will provide our students with labs and classrooms designed for the future. Second, we cannot sustain all the support systems for students we currently have in place. Third, we listened to our community through planning efforts, focus groups and partnerships. We sought guidance through means such as the volunteered Performance Audit, and we followed recommendations as prescribed. We have remained fiscally prudent and we have made strategic decisions to deliver a strong education while remaining cognizant of our fiscal position. Fourth, because this was a renewal levy, homeowner's had the benefit of the 12.5% rollback and if we have to go back for a new levy, our taxpayers will lose this benefit. Fifth, there is also a benefit when we approach voters only once every 10 years. It keeps us off the ballot when our associate schools are on the ballot. The last thing we want to do is compete with our associate districts for any votes at the polls. At this time, two of our four taxing districts will also be on the ballot in November 2017. Additionally, we have a much larger geographical territory and the cost to run a campaign is higher. DACC has continuously remained fiscally prudent and through no fault of our own, we have been put into a negative fiscal situation.

I am also concerned about potential enrollment implications. Just last month I learned of a student who was accepted into a DACC program for next year and is choosing not to attend DACC because of the current fiscal challenge. Students and parents should not be put into a position where they believe they cannot take advantage of the best educational option.

Without HB 124 and through no fault of DACC, we will need to go back to the all voters. It will be difficult for many to understand why we are back in just two years when we promised we would not be back for 10. We carried out a successful levy campaign and won overwhelmingly. I ask this committee to support HB 124 which would allow only those voters in the four counties, whose ballots did not include our levy language, to vote; and those votes to be added to totals from November 2015. The passage and the collection of the November 2015 levy will support the continuation of the many educational experiences available to our students.

Thank you for your time and attention.