

Testimony on HB110 (Appropriations for FY 2022-23 Budget)  
Submitted to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

June 2, 2021 \* Katrina Heinzen at 2652 Eaton Road, University Heights, OH 44118

There is a truly great community within Cleveland, a community full of open minds and open hearts. Generous and fair-minded people who want the best for everyone. Their jobs *and* their volunteer hours point towards a common mindset: the type of people who want to make things better. Not just for ourselves but for the bigger picture, for each and every neighbor. It's the wonderful school district of Cleveland Heights and University Heights. I love it and my son is thriving here, growing to be a compassionate and sensitive young leader who understands the struggles of the world pretty well already. Rather than shield him, I want him to understand the challenges some families face and to embrace them with compassion. I want him to be motivated so strongly to make the world better --for his friends. And he *will* have a difficult time objectifying any person because he is growing up with friends from a variety of backgrounds different from his own. It's not always an easy road, but it's the road with the most growth and wisdom to be found. I love that we have a school system full of opportunities for him. I pray this will not change.

Sometimes, I consider taking public office myself because I also feel a strong desire to make things better, much as I imagine you feel in *your* hearts, too, and I thank you for your service. I thank you all for the years spent researching legislature to support what I believe is our very most important civic heritage: education for all.

I come from a long line of preachers and teachers, going back generations of pioneers out on the plains, building communities with their own hands: building schools and building churches. And can't you just see my great grandpa riding out on horseback from tiny church to tiny church to help stitch these communities together? Each pioneer pitched in to help every neighbor around them --it was the only way they could all thrive. Without knowledge or without the spirit of cooperation they wouldn't have lived very well or very long! The great minds of the founding fathers (each one a proud scholar) also understood the necessity of knowledge and cooperation. They searched all of human history for the highest ideals to form the foundation of civilization on this soil. Providing excellent education for each citizen is paramount to the success of the entire country. Think for a moment: every classroom contributes to your economic success. And to mine. We are all connected by our work, our choices, and yes, even our spending. Quality education potentially leads to greater financial security and the benefits go rippling throughout our state, touching every layer. With more education and earning potential we find better health and less violence. Every citizen benefits when each neighbor has access to the tools to live a good life. Jefferson and his buddies saw this in 1776. My great grandpa saw it in 1876. I'm sure you see this today, as we struggle to save our cities from collapsing under the weight of taxes. They're already starting to crumble. We need your help!

Balancing the finances of HB110 was no doubt crazy-difficult but it seems a fair bill and a sensible approach. I implore you to pass this bill, to look at this as an opportunity to rebuild Ohio for the future, by making things better for one child after another. I wish I were in your shoes; I wish I had the opportunity to fix problems and improve lives! What an incredible feeling that must be! My heart wants nothing more than to heal both cities in my school district. As you have heard in others' testimony we have an alarming rate of families moving to our cities specifically so they can get these vouchers. I don't blame them for taking "free money" but we need you to fix the source of the funding. I need you to fix this. My bright, smiley son brimming over with potential needs you to fix this. He's got a big job to do some day because he's going to want to fix things, too. It's in his DNA and it flows through his heart. And there's so much that needs fixing, right? When times get tough in 20 years, I want to be surrounded by well-educated people, ready to work together like the pioneers did. And my community has so much potential: we are proud to be diverse and supportive of others' differences. It's really cool and really beautiful.

Recently, though, this community has been tearing itself apart with constant upheaval over tax levies for the schools. Did I say "upheaval?" I meant war. So much anger at a school budget no longer balanced due to the vouchers syphoning 9 million dollars away. The volcanic arguments on social media drive more prospective families away, further hurting our chance of getting a good "grade" for the schools on your flawed state report card. A vicious cycle!

We are literally wrecked by the current laws. There is a lot of suffering in my city and it is going to get so much worse if the voucher funding source isn't changed. And if you can fix the whole over-reliance on property taxes, too, then we can truly hope. We simply cannot rely so heavily on property taxes to fund our schools. It isn't sustainable. Great cities like ours will eventually collapse. I see a huge crash coming. There are many miles of mansions in Cleveland Heights. Many are occupied by those who vote conservatively, to, you know, protect their wealth. But if the conservative ticket doesn't protect their wealth in this case, if you don't fix the funding source of the vouchers, their taxes are going to be astronomical... and they are *already* angry. So far, they've been trying to take it out on the kids. But when they snap, they'll take it out on you - switching their contributions and votes to the other team. Have you considered what the taxes are on a million dollar home at our rate? I'd be angry, too! And for those of us with more meager means: it's a struggle. Every day. And I've got it good compared to most, even though Covid left me without a job for nearly a year. And our taxes went up. Scary combination.

Again, you have an amazing opportunity here, to do something truly great and righteous you can be proud of for the rest of your lives! And your children and grandchildren will share the memory and the legacy: you can right a huge wrong! Our state has had a debilitating problem for decades and I can see you want to fix it. Please, please stick with the fair ideas and workable solutions proposed in HB110.