

Interested Party – Substitute HB 110 Operating Budget  
Senate Finance Committee  
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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Gaverone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony about the education portion of the proposed operating budget.

My name is Susie Kaeser and I am a volunteer member of the LWVO lobby corps. I live in Cleveland Heights and have been a public education advocate for nearly four decades. My career in two different nonprofit organizations that focused on public education, has always focused on the importance of citizens as guardians of successful public schools. That drew me to the LWVO, a citizen voice for democracy.

When it comes to education, we know that money matters. It is the foundation for educational opportunity. It is essential to securing the vast range of personnel, materials, facilities, experiences, support, connection, oversight, and inspiration that undergird the daily interaction among children and adults that leads to growth and full realization of human potential.

Public money is the life blood for our system of public education and its capacity to provide a safe and nurturing environment and a high quality education for all, and to equalize the sacrifice that taxpayers make to ensure that our democracy and our society have the benefit of an educated electorate.

The state budget, the blueprint for expending public funds, is a moral document. The decisions you make today and over the next few weeks about investing public funds in education will tell us a lot about your values. The two options before you represent very different values. We will learn from your choices the depth of your commitment to democracy, equality, and fairness.

Since December the LWVO has submitted testimony supporting the Fair School Funding Plan. This bi-partisan investment in our system of public education expresses values that are deeply held by LWVO. As a budget proposal it affirms the Ohio Constitution, and affirms that education is so important to the success of our society, our state, and individuals, that it should be operated and funded as a public agency. Education is not a consumer choice it is a public good. When you invest in the public system you are not protecting an institution, you are investing in democracy. You are providing children and families protections and guarantees that are not available in the free market.

A well-funded public system, which ensures that all children, regardless of their needs or where they live have access to a high quality education, is the way to use money to express support for the democratic intentions and values of a democracy.

The Fair School Funding Plan meets this standard.

We are deeply disappointed by the senate's substitute budget plan for education. It is offered with little time for scrutiny. It was developed out of public view. It is temporary and inadequate. It lacks a comprehensive assessment of cost, disregards the inherent inequity of property taxes, it ignores deep

differences in the challenges facing individual school districts based on their transportation costs and the demographics of who they serve. These are the considerations that produce an accurate assessment of what is adequate funding, and how to share responsibility for providing them. It is a serious retreat into the past.

It is troubling on another front. While austerity drives the investment in public education, the senate plan shows no restraint when it comes to private education. The state coffers are chock full when it comes to increasing public funds for vouchers, offering tax credits for private schools and home schooling, and expanding the growth of charter schools. It is hard to comprehend how tax cutting, holding down costs in the public realm and vastly increasing the public investment in education that is neither regulated nor accountable nor inclusive goes together as something coherent or reasonable.

If allowed to become law, the senate education budget will weaken our system of public education. It will underfund the public system and make equal access to high quality education impossible.

You have listened to and read testimony from hundreds of Ohio citizens and educators who have expressed confidence in their public schools and the desperate need for an infusion of state resources. School district budgets as well as local taxpayers are stretched to the limit. A 21<sup>st</sup> century education may be required for a thriving economy, but it is out of reach in too many places.

The Fair School Funding Plan seeks to achieve what the Ohio Constitution wants for all of the people of the state: a high quality public education. The state's responsibility is to make sure that it is equally available to all students and that taxpayers in each community are treated fairly. This requires the state budget to allocate sufficient funds to public education, and distribute them to school districts in a way that provides a proper balance of state and local investments.

You have a clear choice. The senate proposal advances limited government and individual choice. The Fair School Funding Plan affirms equal opportunity, the value of every individual, education as a civic purpose, and the importance of an educated citizenry to a democracy.

As Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall put it in the 1974 *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* decision, "I believe the question of education quality must be deemed to be an objective one that looks at what the state provides its children, not what the children are able to do with what they receive."

We urge you to choose the Fair School Funding Plan and provide children in communities across this state the resources for a quality public education.