

Proponent Testimony for HB33, Section 3318.33
Senate Finance Committee
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Superintendent Nick Dettwiller, Eastern Meigs Local School District
Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Cirino, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Nick Dettwiller, I am the Superintendent of Eastern Local School District in Meigs County. I am here today to provide insight to Section 3318.33 of HB33, the Accelerated Appalachian School Building Assistance Program.

When discussing the state of school facilities in Ohio, most believe the DeRolph case and creation of the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission solved this issue once and for all. Unfortunately, I am here today to tell you that has not yet been the case.

Eastern Local serves about 700 students in Meigs County in SouthEast Ohio. Anyone really lost, we are about 30 minutes south of Athens, and Ohio University or more people know the hometown of Bengals Quarterback Joe Burrow. Joe's mom is actually our Elementary Principal.

We currently have a 70 year old Junior Senior High School and a 25 year old Preschool-6th grade building that houses a full time health clinic open to the public with healthcare and dental, multiple mental health counselors. We also have a public library in our facility, and we have recently added multiple career tech options for our students, and over 65% of our students take CCP classes. We also provide dozens of extracurricular options for our students and our students are incredibly successful in academics and extracurriculars as you will hear from Rylee here shortly. We truly are the center of the community.

Our buildings have severe maintenance costs with old leaky roofs, aging HVAC that need replaced, and many of the other upgrades needed with aging buildings. As we have worked with the OFCC to build our master plan and begin the Expedited local partnership process, and we have all available ESSER funds to put a new roof on one of our buildings and install an outside air chiller, but we have many more issues and we have also found out that even with an OFCC project we would need to pay for a close to 2 million dollar project to fix a sinking floor in our elementary gym before we could start the OFCC portion and our local share. A one Mill levy in our district produces around 100,000 dollars. So when we go to our families for our local share of the project it is a big ask. Especially in an aging community where a large portion of our population are retirees on a fixed income. As a district we have worked hard to take care of our facilities over the years and we are proud of what we have, but we want our kids to have some of the same opportunities as other students across the state.

This is the reality for not only our district, but for 38+ other school districts within the Appalachian Ohio region who have deferred, lapsed, or not yet been offered funding through the

OFCC. These are hard working families and communities, with a lot of pride, but the realities of the economics of the region make passing levies very difficult and very taxing on our people.

In the year 2000, the legislature enacted the Accelerated Urban School Building Assistance Program, which targeted funding for new facilities in the six largest urban districts in Ohio. Over the past 23 years, this program has built over 250 new school buildings in these six urban districts. The Urban Accelerated Program has taught us that targeted aid for high-need school districts *works*. The Appalachian Accelerated Program would provide the same, long overdue aid for our districts. The funds appropriated by the Ohio House in this budget would allow our districts to receive offers from the OFCC more quickly, separating us geographically into our own program. It includes a levy incentive program to ensure our communities can take advantage of the facilities funds being offered to them, and catapult our districts into learning spaces designed for the 21st century – just as the previous legislation did for urban districts. This would be huge for the students of this region.

I ask you to protect the investment made by the Ohio House in the Section 3318.33 of HB33, as these dollars for new school buildings means opportunities for our students. I want our students to wake up each morning and attend school in a building that gives them the best opportunity for academic success: where they can learn in a safe, temperature controlled environment with modern amenities; without leaks and cracks and sinking floors. I have no doubt our kids will work hard and find success either way, but just like every parent wants their child to have the best opportunity for success we want to give those opportunities to our students.