

Thank you, Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, and Ranking Member Skyes for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ava Patten, and I am a junior in high school at Dublin Coffman. I have the privilege of attending a well-funded school and district. I was never fully aware of the unjust practices of unequal funding through schools.

As I sat across from a fellow junior in Columbus City Schools, she threw up her hands in frustration because her school lacked the bare minimum for a good education: textbooks, heating and cooling, functioning plumbing, and adequate teachers. This shouldn't be the case. Having proper education and resources is a human right.

My first reaction was guilt. At Coffman, I walk into an air-conditioned dream, textbooks published last year, filtered water fountains, Jumbo TVs in every classroom, communal workspaces, and an entirely separate campus dedicated to advanced classes (Emerald Campus). I can take my first steps in a Bio-Med career with the Bio med class, I can go to the Teacher's Academy class, and learn how to run a business all without leaving Dublin City Schools and so much more. I heard the terror stories that have become everyday occurrences to kids in other school districts while I'm able to receive tremendous amounts of opportunities and they are fighting for their education instead of receiving one.

My second emotion was anger. Plumbing and basic amenities are not where the disparities end. We are in a teen mental health crisis and school funding including funding mental health initiatives and counselors is needed. My Dublin school has 6 guidance counselors, and 5 student support staff which include 2 psychologists. According to the ACLU, "Up to 80 percent of youth in need of mental health services do not receive services in their communities because existing services are inadequate. Of those who do receive assistance, 70 to 80 percent of youth receive mental health care in their schools. Students are 21 times more likely to visit school-based health centers for mental health than community mental health centers."

I live less than eight miles from Centennial High School. According to US News and World Report, my school district ranked 38th in Ohio, Centennial ranks at 202. A short drive from my house shouldn't lead to the funds and resources for students to drastically drop. Our addresses shouldn't determine the level of resources and structure to get within our education system. Let's talk about test scores. 78% of Dublin Coffman students test proficient in Math. Centennial proficiency is almost half of that at 42%.

Textbooks that are decades old is not equal education.

Missing class because of heat or cold is not equal education.

Dodging hazards, falling ceiling tiles, and busted pipes is not equal education.

Pests and rodents running around the halls is not equal education

Having to get on a waitlist to see a counselor is not equal education.

Equal access to equal education is our way out of inequality. If you don't fully implement the Fair School Funding Plan, I will have learned an important lesson about your priorities. ONLY some of us are treated like "the future". Believe in students enough to fund their futures.

At Dublin Schools, I feel taken care of. My counselor knows me. After my dad passed I received nothing but resources, grace, love and support from my school. And that support never ended. The same administrators have kept in contact with my family and I. They made sure I was taken care of going into highschool as well. Any time I'm struggling I know I can count on my school's staff and teachers to truly care for me. I can walk into the guidance wing at my school to receive help immediately. Without their presence I don't know where I would be now. My guidance counselor has shown me opportunities that have changed my life, treating me as family. I want every student to have the same feeling. We need YOU to care.

House Bill 33 is our chance. Fund schools equally and well. And do it now. There are thousands of kids relying on you to make a change now, we aren't waiting till 10 years' time because the current students are desperate to have a better school experience. Students shouldn't be struggling to receive the bare minimum from schools due to the lack of funding. Determining school funding by property tax is unjust and schools should be getting better resources no matter the taxes. Let's open our eyes and fully and permanently fund the fair school funding plan starting in this budget and don't wait to phase it in. Thank you.

