

PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF:

Dena Sico
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IN SUPPORT OF: H.B. 33 To express the intent of the General Assembly to continue phasing-in the school financing system established in H.B. 33 of the 134th General Assembly and, if practicable, fully phase it in.

Senate Finance Committee

Good afternoon, Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Finance Committee. My name is Dena Sico, I am a parent within the Columbus City School district. My son is in 3rd grade, my daughter will be starting Kindergarten within the district this Fall, and my husband is a CCS graduate. **I am in support of fully funding the Fair School Funding plan outlined in HB33.**

As our children approached school age, my husband and I watched our neighbors with young children flee from our neighborhood to affluent suburbs. We made an intentional choice to stay within the Columbus City school system. I have to take a moment to acknowledge that my family has the privilege to make that choice. There are many families within our district whose economic circumstances leave them without a choice. I believe that all children deserve equitable financial support for their public education, regardless of where they live or their circumstances. My kids don't deserve any more or less than any other child. We have experienced this inequality firsthand as our former neighbors and friends in more affluent districts enjoy the privilege of smaller class sizes, additional enrichment opportunities, and more accessible support inside and outside the classroom. My family is committed to any effort that prioritizes improved funding and resources to the kids that need it most in every public school district in Ohio.

Public education in this state can thrive; it will take investment and commitment from you. I was engaged in the budget cycle process 2 years ago when the Fair School Funding formula was initially passed. It was important *then* because our leaders were finally addressing the state's decades-long unconstitutional public school funding formula, which is one of the leading causes of the inequities in the public school system that we see today. I am engaged *now* because, as you know, a budget action remains a temporary fix and renewed advocacy is needed every two years to ensure public education is prioritized and our public schools, and the children within them, have what they need to succeed.

I am here to ask that you fully fund the Fair School Funding plan rather than slowly phase it in. Our public schools are in desperate need of more funding. There are a lot of anti-public education bills going around this session, with lots of funding mechanisms being pulled in other directions, away from public schools. The longer we wait to fully fund these schools, the more

kids are underserved and lack the resources they need to thrive as students and grow into successful adults.

I was one parent among many who stood alongside teachers during the Columbus City Schools negotiation with the Columbus Education Association at the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Parents were there to support educators because we know our schools are incredibly under-resourced and our teachers are underpaid. While we were pushing the School Board to negotiate in good faith and spend our limited dollars more effectively, we knew at the core of the problem was the limited access to resources for the district itself. It simply isn't enough. What does it say about our community that the 2022-23 school year was disrupted by something as basic as air conditioning in classrooms, a problem that was supposed to be addressed by this Assembly with school facility funding allocations over a decade ago?

The assembly has a constitutional mandate to ensure public education is properly funded and our children have equal access to the same quality education as their peers throughout our state.

As you all know, in 1997, in *DeRolph v. State*, the Ohio Supreme Court declared the State's school funding system unconstitutional, specifically citing four major flaws in the system, including insufficient state funding for school facilities and a flawed school funding formula. The Court wrote, "A system without basic instructional materials and supplies can hardly constitute a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state as mandated by our Constitution,"

If we do not fund fairly all school districts in Ohio, our children in economically disadvantaged areas, both urban and rural, will remain vulnerable to teacher shortages, overwhelming classroom sizes, crumbling infrastructure, chaotic bussing, and an embarrassing lack of basic resources. All of these factors diminish their abilities to succeed academically and beyond.

Our state needs the leaders in this assembly to be education champions who will not relent until all children have what they need to learn and to thrive. Fully funding the Fair School Funding Plan now is a major step towards a better education system for all of Ohio's children. Please make the most of this opportunity to be the superheros our children can look up to, by supporting this bill. Thank you for your time and your consideration today, I trust you will make the right choice to support all of Ohio's families.