

Testimony on HB110 (Appropriations for FY 2022-23 Budget)
Submitted to the Ohio Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee,
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by Ari Klein, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, I am writing to urge you to pass, implement and fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan in HB110.

My two children graduated from the Cleveland Heights – University Heights School District, where my wife, my parents, and I all went to school. I am retiring next month from my entire 33 year teaching career in this same school system.

Throughout my career I have witnessed desperation for funding public schools that has gotten worse and worse. We have always taxed ourselves heavily in my community, but in the last 8-10 years the state has caused an exponential drain on local dollars by allowing the deduction method of funding community schools, as well as private and parochial schools through vouchers. My district has been hard hit with losses not because you have labelled our schools as “failing” but because we have a diverse community that has a significant private and parochial school population. 93% of the families who use EdChoice vouchers have never attended and never planned to attend our public schools. We now lose more than half of our annual state foundation funding! Public school advocates, like me, support families' choice on how to educate their children, but not to have levy income diverted from its true purpose. For students using EdChoice local dollars must be used to subsidize them since our state aid is less than the money the state requires to be deducted from our school district. For example, Ohio deducts \$6,000 for each high school student using EdChoice, but our foundation aide is less than \$3,000 per student. You have no right to spend more on students we don't educate in the public system in the name of “choice”.

The result of these state policies for our community are enormous because with district enrollment at just over 5,000 we can't afford to pay the price for an additional 2,200 students who use Community Schools and Vouchers. Remember, over 90% of these students using Vouchers have never set foot in our buildings.

To make matters worse, when the state aid was frozen that meant that EACH additional student using EdChoice and Community Schools had the full amount deducted from our ledgers without any new income – so local dollars are once again being misdirected from what voters levied upon themselves.

The results of the last few years of this financial debacle on school employees has been devastating. We have watched our students lose programs and support personnel as the inevitable annual cuts are made. We have watched teachers leave our district and the teaching profession in search of stability. It is difficult to tally the toll. Where once students and families were able to count on ongoing relationships with faculty and staff, now there is much less institutional stability. The students we serve in our schools are predominantly minority and low income. For some, school is the most constant and stable aspect of their lives. The state has chipped away at this stability in my district through formulas that don't work and privatization efforts that take away dear local dollars.

The good news is that the Fair School Funding Plan would help rectify a number of these issues. It is well thought out and researched over several years, vetted by practitioners, and would allow you, as legislators, to fulfill your one true fiscal responsibility as laid out in the Ohio Constitution – funding a system of common schools. This plan has overwhelming support from the Ohio House, whose members represent the same people as you. My work as a teacher may be coming to an end, but I believe it is my responsibility to continue advocating for communities across the state by ensuring proper funding of schools. Healthy schools equate to a stronger Ohio. You have this chance to make sure that Ohio's priorities are clear for the huge majority of families who use public schools in our state. You can fix this broken system. As MLK Jr. said, "The time is always right to do what is right."