

Senate Education Committee

House Bill 96

May 7, 2025

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 96. My name is Melissa Harris, and I serve as President of the Board of Education of Delaware City Schools in Delaware County.

I appreciate the work of this committee and the General Assembly, and I respectfully offer the following comments on several provisions in House Bill 96.

To give you a little background, I am the 3rd generation of 4 generations of Delaware City Schools graduates, all of which are still living. My grandparents, my parents, myself, and my children graduated from DCS then went on to work in construction, water treatment, teaching, to become CFO, work in nonprofit, the local police department, and employed by the State of Ohio. The skills learned, connections made, and growth experienced while students in DCS is what helped us to make decisions about our futures.

Over these 4 generations there have been curriculum changes, areas of focus have expanded, and opportunities have increased. As DCS Alumni, we value our education from DCS, and I take the ongoing education of DCS students personally, hence my reason to run for the Board of Education. I am committed to our students who continue to win NASA competitions, are Emmy winning directors, who come back to our district to educate our next generations of scholars, and the numerous other accomplishments of our alumni that time will not allow me to discuss today.

Much like you, I was elected into my position by tax paying individuals in my district and I have the moral obligation to speak on their behalf and in the best interest of their children, and hard earned tax dollars, and our staff in its entirety. I came here today to tell you House Bill 96 as approved by the house is not in the best interest of the school districts or your constituents. HB 96 would limit the ability of DCS to provide similar and additional opportunities that the generations of my family have been able to experience.

DCS has sound fiscal management policies, which can be seen by financial statements being provided every month during our regular board meetings. The District also recently refunded a portion of our outstanding bond obligations this year and during that process we were able to enhance our credit rating, which allows us to provide positively back to our district and taxpayers. Because of these steps we have taken and our commitment to remain fiscally responsible, we have received awards from the Auditor of State and GFOA on numerous occasions. If House Bill 96 is adopted as currently proposed and approved by the House, DCS will have its right to be fiscally responsible taken away which will also take away the trust of our families and it will be virtually impossible to forecast budgets from year to year for us or any school district in Ohio.

DCS already faces numerous unfunded mandates that have a huge impact on our district. Some of those mandates include:

- Senate Bill 29/HB 32 Student Data Privacy Compliance
- High Dosage Tutoring
- Financial Literacy class as a graduation requirement for each student
- Dyslexia Screening and Assessment
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline documentation (on ID cards, planners, and portals)
- Threat Assessment Training
- Title IX training, investigation, and decision making
- Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act (all evaluations, plans, investigations)
- Course/Curriculum Requirements
- CCP Textbooks
- A portion of the Science of Reading Training

Transportation is also a huge part of unfunded mandates. For example, for 24 students, transportation cost DCS \$357,763.10 in the school year 2023-2024. That cost was split between 4 transportation vendors that transported our students individually for various reasons. During the school year 2024-2025, we have already incurred the cost of \$166,634.09 through March. Some of our additional special education costs for contracted services or student placements outside of our District in 2023-2024 topped \$1,090,475.93 and for 2024-2025 we were already at \$718,539.97 through March. Keep in mind, the transportation and special education costs mentioned are for only a handful of students, which is just a minimal fraction of the overall students who are transported or receive special education accommodations through our district. Although the state does provide a small per student allotment for the highest need students, the district carries the majority of the costs and there is an extreme amount of administrative overhead to calculate this cost for requested reimbursement for these individual students. For example, spending \$1million and receiving approximately \$300,000 for around 30 students in threshold cost isn't sustainable. We are by no means saying we

do not want to provide services for our students, we would just like to be able to have these services funded at 100%. In DCS, we believe every student has a right to the same level of education as the student beside them, we would just like to have the majority of the burden of the costs that are mandated removed from our shoulders.

To do that, Delaware City Schools asks the Senate to:

- Not decrease the State's share of our funding in the next Ohio Biennium Budget
- Use current input data to determine the actual cost to educate, not data from 2022
- Fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan with the changes previously mentioned
- Remove the provision restricting school cash fund balances to 30% or 90 days. This restriction could cost DCS over \$6million just in 2025-2026 SY
- Consider funding unfunded mandates through Special Education and Transportation

Without these changes to the previously approved HB 96 by the house, the generational growth, exploration, and success of Delaware City Schools students and alumni will not be possible. The hard work of our district to spend responsibly, and maintain fiscal responsibility will be impossible and could mean staff cuts and the closing of our doors.

Chair Brenner and members of the committee, thank you for your time, attention and consideration of these key factors to support Delaware City Schools. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.