

The Honorable Senator Cliff Hite  
1 Capitol Square, 1st Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

**HB49 Testimony,**

*May 24, 2017*

**Chairman Hite, Vice Chair Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee on  
Primary and Secondary Education:**

My name is James Phillips. I am the Treasurer/CFO of the South Range Local School District, Mahoning County, where I have served since 1991. I have witnessed the continuing reduction of **public** school funding since the recession of 2008. South Range's State Foundation is currently 4.67 million dollars, less than the 4.72 million dollars that it was in 2004. State funding for our school district in 2017 is about 1% **less** than it had been 13 years earlier in 2004. According to the base year 1967 Consumer Price Index, a funding **increase** of 27% between 2004 and 2017 would have allowed us to keep pace with the inflationary costs of operating our schools. That has not happened.

Our buildings and grounds did not get any smaller. In fact, in partnership with the Ohio School Facilities Commission, South Range now maintains over 225,000 square feet of facilities on one site; nearly 56,000 square feet more than the two separate buildings the OSFC facility replaced. We no longer have to educate kids in dingy basement hallways and special education rooms made out of former maintenance closets. The State legislature did the right and responsible thing helping to replace many of the state's buildings, many of which were nearing the 100 year old mark. The school buildings were built under the guidelines of the Ohio School Facilities Design Manual – they are functional, and they are not Taj Mahals.

The Governor has suggested that the guarantee in the State formula for school funding ought to be eliminated. Working towards that end in this budget proposal, the Governor's plan causes a 5% decrease totaling nearly 235 thousand dollars in each of the two years for South Range Local schools. That translates to a \$1,175,000 reduction over our five year forecast.

South Range is a small rural school district that has performed very well in relation to State set standards since the inception of the various academic performance measurement programs. In fact, we were one of a handful of districts to be rated excellent for the first 12 or 13 years straight of the academic ratings.

Following the financial difficulties of the recession, the district fell to "effective" rather than "excellent" in 2012. We attribute the drop in performance to the reduction in teaching and support personnel we were forced to make to balance our budget. We have since regained "excellent" rating status, but such a large reduction in funding as HB49 inflicts on South Range once again risks taking its toll on our students educational development should we be forced to make further personnel reductions.

The South Range Board of Education and administration are rule followers. We always work hard to meet State mandates and outcome goals set by the State.

Although I have no scientific evidence to absolutely link funding with the successes we have enjoyed at South Range, it is not unreasonable to suggest that fewer teachers, tutors, and aids will result in a negative impact on our student's performances. We know how to successfully teach children. **It takes people.** Our record proves that with adequate instructional levels, we can help all students maximize their academic abilities.

In addition to the guarantee reduction currently proposed in HB49, South Range will continue to **not** receive any inflationary increases. The HB49 reduction in funding combined with ever increasing "below the line" deductions of State and Local tax dollars given to non-traditional schools is a trend that should end if our public common school is to survive for our children, grandchildren, and beyond.

I hope this body will reconsider all of the successes that Ohio's public educational systems have provided and adequately fund our success in the next biennium and beyond. South Range Local Schools student's success is proof that a good education can have a profound effect on student's lives, as well as the future of our American society and is an extremely important function of public service that should not be diminished.

As earlier stated, the CPI is up over 27% since 2004. State funding for South Range Schools is down 1% in that same time period. During my career in public education, we have gone from advocating for reasonable inflationary increases to begging for minimized cuts in state support. So, please, please do not eliminate the guarantee.

*Thank you for your kindness in hearing this testimony today. I'll try to entertain any questions you may have at this time:*