



Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee on Substitute House Bill 1

May 30, 2009

Chairman Carey, Ranking Member Miller, members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Ann Sheldon, and I am the executive director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC).

Over the course of the last few months, gifted education has gone through three methods of funding: the current unit funding method that is a vestige of the old special education funding model and that has been chronically underfunded, the faulty Odden and Picus ADM gifted funding method introduced in the governor's plan, and the Ohio House organizational unit method, which actually was based on research and cost-based evidence. This committee, I believe, tried to take gifted funding back to the current method of unit funding, but the conflicting language in the substitute bill is confusing to the point of being non-sensical. In addition, \$4.8 million in gifted identification funds in each year of the biennium were completely eliminated. Unit funding also was cut by \$700,000. While foundation level funding and other categorical areas were all flat funded or increased slightly, gifted education funding was cut from the current level of \$48 million down to a proposed level of \$42.5 million. This \$5.5 million or 12% cut comes at a time when gifted services in Ohio's districts are particularly vulnerable.

Due to the ever-changing gifted funding mechanism over the past few months and the years of flat funding, districts have sent out reduction-in-force notices to gifted staff in over 150 districts. Many gifted coordinators and intervention specialists have been told that their jobs *may* be reinstated if the budget bill the Senate passes maintains at least the same level of funding as the House bill. Without clarification of the language and restoration of funding before this bill leaves the Senate, gifted services will be damaged next year more than they already are. It is particularly puzzling that the gifted identification funds were cut from the bill. As gifted students are required to be identified, the elimination of these funds leaves districts with a new unfunded mandate. And without the identification funds, many districts will not identify these children. It is a particularly brutal loss for unidentified and underrepresented gifted children in urban and rural areas, who are the least likely children to be identified as gifted in Ohio. The loss of these funds shuts the door on even the hope that they will reach their potential.

I don't know what this committee had in mind when they cut gifted funding. I hope that it is not a deliberate cut, but merely one of those "unintended consequences" that gifted children seem to be the victim of all too frequently in this budget cycle. Regardless, this language and the gifted funding cuts in Substitute House Bill 1 are extremely hurtful to gifted children in Ohio. I am also disappointed and surprised to see that this committee removed the gifted performance indicator language as well as the provision that requires districts to actually spend gifted funds in transitional aid on services to gifted children and to maintain gifted spending effort. Some districts already know that they can return gifted units, use the gifted funds in transitional aid for whatever they wish and cut gifted services. It appears that under this substitute bill, there is to be no level of accountability for gifted children in this state. At a time when Ohio leaders cry out for the need to be competitive and bemoan the loss of talented workers, it seems counter-intuitive to do even less for Ohio's gifted children. Given that gifted funding isn't on the list of areas to be studied by the "Student-Centered, Evidence-Based Funding Council," it appears that once again gifted children are to be left behind in Ohio. Our economy will never regain strength with the continued "brain drain" experienced in Ohio. Brain drain does not begin at the workforce or even the college level; it begins in kindergarten and it begins with these children

While I understand that there are tough choices to be made in this budget, it does appear that gifted children take an unfair hit when all other children in the K – 12 education system are held harmless. Make no mistake, left as is, the gifted funding level and language in this bill will have a devastating effect on gifted children throughout Ohio. I ask committee members to do the following:

- Restore the gifted identification funds to the 2009 level;
- Restore the gifted unit funding to the 2009 level;
- Rewrite the gifted funding mechanism language so it is consistent with current law and practice;
- Reinstate the gifted performance indicator language;
- Reinstate the provision requiring districts to spend gifted transitional aid on gifted services and maintain the gifted maintenance of effort provision; and finally,
- Include gifted education as an area to be studied by the Student-Centered, Evidence-Based Funding Council and ensure that a member of the gifted community is on the council.

Without these changes, there will be another round of gifted service cuts next week.

For additional information, please contact Ann Sheldon, Executive Director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children at anngift@aol.com or 614-475-4416 or 614-325-1185 (cell). www.oagc.com