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Intermediate Unit 1
Testimony – PA Fair Funding Hearing (10-12-2023)

Thank you for this invitation to present on the Fair Funding Formula Hearing this morning. My name is Donald Martin, and I am the Executive Director of Intermediate Unit 1. Our Educational Service Agency services 25 school districts, five Career-Technical Centers, one Charter School, and a multitude of non-public and parochial schools in Fayette, Greene, and Washington Counties.

Let me begin by pointing out that Fayette and Greene Counties are two of the poorest out of the 67 counties in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. While several schools across Pennsylvania have legitimate concerns relative to funding, the communities in these two counties have several fiscal issues in addition to school funding. Since there is a limited amount of time to discuss school fiscal issues today, I will focus on key discussion points from the lens of an educational service agency.

Shared Services

According to 2021-2022 final Average Daily Membership data, out of the 25 school districts in IU1, seven schools have 1,000 or less students, 11 were reported having between 1,000-2,000 students, and eight have 2,500 or above. Many of these schools are within 10 miles or less from one another. We need to find a way to provide districts in this region incentives to provide **coordinated** shared services in the areas of Advanced Placement and College in the High School courses, career-based education programs, even general education programs.

Staffing

In the current situation, districts in IU1 have a vast teacher/student ratio. Some elementary schools may have 30 students per class, while others may have 20. In providing true equity to districts (and not depending upon local tax dollars), the new funding formula should address funding necessary for equitable class sizes.

ESL

IU1 has two districts that lead the state in English Language Learners (ELL). These districts are expected to educate ELL students immediately, yet may not see

reimbursements until a year later, dependent upon the student's continuation of participation in that district. The new formula needs to address English/Language Learners independently, perhaps with incentives to provide shared services. At the very least, districts that have an influx of ELL should be able to receive funding immediately to assist in balancing the current year's district budget.

Technology/Facilities

Many of the districts in IU1 struggle with upgrading facilities because that is a burden on taxpayers. I believe there should be incentives provided to districts that have schools in need of facility/technology upgrades using a depreciation time-frame. Schools should be rewarded for the upkeep of our older facilities and infrastructure. In our current system, it oftentimes is less expensive for districts to build new structures as opposed to maintaining the ones it already has.

Accountability

In education, our schools have been under tremendous pressure to produce adequate assessment scores in the areas of mathematics, reading, and science. While this is invaluable data to assist districts in making curricular decisions, this shouldn't be the key focus area. We should be focusing as a state on collecting and analyzing post graduate data to ensure that districts are producing students who have become productive citizens in society.