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NEWS RELEASE

School fees waived for students who receive free lunch

Hundreds of thousands of families across Ohio will save a significant amount of money this fall thanks to legislation inserted into the state budget by State Representative Debbie Phillips.

Phillips, who lives in the city of Athens and represents the 92nd Ohio House District, placed an amendment into the state budget that waives general school fees for all public students who receive free lunch. The amendment was then approved as part of the larger budget bill.

This means that children who receive free lunch as part of the National School Lunch Program will no longer have to pay general school fees. The legislation does not apply to extra-curricular fees.

It is common in Ohio for public schools to charge families between \$25 and \$100 per child. These fees are only to attend the schools, which are supposed to be free for all children. Public school students are also often required to bring in supplies that cost between \$10 and \$50, and sometimes even more.

Public schools also often charge additional fees for extra-curricular activities, field trips, class materials, pizza parties and other school events. Students who are unable to pay these fees in most cases are excluded from these activities.

This is wrong and needs to be changed.

In today's economy, more and more Ohio families do not have enough money to meet their own basic needs, and it is nearly impossible for them to pay these fees.

Athens County Job and Family Services has been lobbying state leaders for several years to eliminate public school fees for all Ohio children and provide a truly free public education.

The waiving of school fees for children who receive free lunch is a tremendous first step and it will help hundreds of thousands of families.

In Athens County, the Alexander, Athens and Federal Hocking school districts charge school fees while the Nelsonville-York and Trimble districts do not. The fees range between \$20 and \$40, and are lower than school fees in many other Ohio districts. Some Ohio high schools, for example, charge more than \$100 just to take one class.

In some cases, the advanced placement classes, such as advanced placement English or advanced placement social studies, cost more than \$100, while the lower level sections of the

courses are much less expensive. This would seemingly price some students out of being able to afford the advanced classes that might best help them.

Many schools in Ohio have even contracted with debt collection services in order to help them collect fees from all of the parents. Some districts have systems that allow parents to pay school fees on-line with their credit cards, but they have to pay an additional fee for this service.

The change in school fees this fall will help many of these families, as the National Free Lunch program is continuing to become more and more popular. In 2008, more than 600,000 schoolchildren in Ohio received free lunches.

Hopefully, more families who qualify will now sign up for the free lunch program, which will result in all of these children having their general fees waived. And ideally, now that this big step has been taken to eliminate school fees, more action will be taken by the Ohio General Assembly to eliminate all school fees for all Ohio families.