



Local Leaders Cite Continued Pressure from State Budgets

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An updated database of state aid to schools and communities released Thursday pegs lost revenue for local leaders from the past two state budgets at more than \$1.8 billion.

One Ohio Now, an advocacy group that pushes for more funding for public services, joined with officials from Cincinnati, Athens and Dayton to describe the local hardships linked to state pullbacks. **Think tanks Innovation Ohio and Policy Matters Ohio helped to compile the data.**

The groups rolled out the www.cutshurtohio.com website in 2012 to document county-level effects of Gov. John Kasich's FY12-13 budget, and Thursday they noted the addition of new data now reflects effects of the FY14-15 budget passed last year as well.

"Overall, across the board when you add together all the county changes, we saw \$349 million in losses to education, and \$1.5 billion in losses to local governments when you compare the budgets over the last four years," said Gavin DeVore Leonard, state director for One Ohio Now.

The website arrives at those figures by starting with former Gov. Ted Strickland's FY10-11 budget and adding increased revenue to schools and communities from casino taxes, then subtracting lost revenue from the Kasich budgets. Those cuts include reductions in the Local Government Fund and Public Library Fund; the accelerated phase out of state reimbursements to local communities for the elimination of the Tangible Personal Property Tax and Kilowatt Hour Tax; elimination of the Ohio estate tax; and the decision not to replace federal stimulus funding built into Strickland's budget.

Chris Seelbach, a Cincinnati City councilman, said the deficit Cincinnati faced when passing its most recent budget just about mirrors the city's loss of LGF money. The result, Seelbach said, were cuts to pension contributions, neighborhood services and local health efforts, as well as reductions in police hiring that left the city unable to replace all its retiring officers. Kasich cut the LGF in half in his first budget to address the state's own deficit at the time.

Seelbach said the state budgets undercut Cincinnati's recent bounce-back from a decades-long trend of population loss.

"As a local government, we're doing really well, we're increasing our population, things are going very well here, but we're still having to make cuts because the governor has taken money away," he said.

Tom Gibbs, associate superintendent of Athens City Schools, said in his most recent job as a superintendent in Washington County, he had an eight-year run ending in 2013 where per-pupil spending stayed about flat despite increases in various costs.

"The only way that eight years goes by with the inflation we've had in health care costs, transportation costs ... is we had to reduce services to kids," he said.

"I think people need to stand up and face the facts that we have a revenue crisis," said Mark Donaghy, executive director of the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority.

Rob Nichols, Kasich's spokesman, cited the involvement of Policy Matters and Innovation Ohio to dismiss the criticisms as political. Strickland helped to start Innovation Ohio, and former advisers to him work there.

"So the brainchilds and the architects behind the \$8 billion budget hole and the 400,000 lost jobs now think that they have the credibility to comment on how we go about cleaning up their galactic mess?" Nichols said. "Instead of attacking us they should be going around the state apologizing to every Ohioan for turning Ohio into a raging dumpster fire."

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