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Greetings. I am Rev. Mary Finklea and I serve Cross and Crown Lutheran Church in Florence, and we partner with Savannah Grove Elementary School, in Effingham, which is less than a mile from my home.

My motivation in speaking before you today is this. Every child is precious and holy in the sight of God. Every child has been given unique attributes and abilities, that when nurtured, helps them discover their full potential for the good of society. Fair and appropriate funding for public education is a moral matter.

But, but, but, even if morality and righteousness didn't compel me to be here today, money would. You heard me. Money, good stewardship also compels me to be here today.

Simply put, efficient and effective stewardship begs us to invest in these students now. Investing in all our children will reduce long-term costs on the backend for unemployment, healthcare, and incarceration. Also, having an educated work-force is attractive to employers, and that is good for our state.

Too many of South Carolina's children are suffering from generational poverty. In my mind, education is the only thing that can break that barrier. I serve proudly as a member of the Board of Trustees for Francis Marion University, and I applaud the good work of Dr. Tammy Polawski. Nearly 95% of FMU students come from South Carolina. 34% are the first in their generation to set foot on a college campus. We need to do more in early childhood and elementary years to prepare young children for successful graduation and college. Help these kids to see what is possible in their lives!

Friends, it may be morals or money or some other motivation that brings you here tonight. But I hope whatever it is, that causes you to stand up for equitable and fair rural public education, sustains you in the days and years ahead. Our children deserve better than minimally adequate, and the fact that we can't even meet minimally adequate is heart breaking. I would encourage this committee to dream big dreams and use this advantageous time to make a difference in the lives of our children.