CONCERNED CITIZENS — Approximately 150 people were in attendance during the Warren County R-III School Board meeting held on Nov. 18 to vote on a series of budget cut proposals totaling $619,000 in savings across the district. Nine different speakers, including past and present students and staff, shared public comments. Citizens expressed their concern over the reduction of programming related to agriculture and drafting, in particular.

Klingensmith, noting that $1.7 million (five percent of district's budget) in total cuts have been made over the past two years. "That's a pretty substantial cut and a lot of money without eliminating any academic programs. Now we're getting to a point where we don't have that option."

Board members heard from both current and past students and staff, as well as members of the community. Multiple students shared personal testimonies of how the agricultural or drafting programs led them toward fulfilling career paths.

Also expressing her concern was FFA parliamentarian Mary Schlueter, one of several dozen students in attendance. She responded to the board's suggestion of reintroducing a tax increase proposal on the April ballot in an effort to potentially salvage the programs.

"Personally, I don't see how our taxpayer dollars are responsible for their financial mishaps and how that has to come back." Vice President Dr. Chad Smith presented a series of slides displaying the differential in local revenue going toward each R-III student, as it compares to similar districts in the area. He and fellow members challenged those in attendance to examine ways residents can preserve curriculum through their vote and by shopping local.

"I happen to agree with a lot of the public comments tonight," said Smith. "This is not a situation that any of us want to be in — not a situation where we have sought to eliminate these programs. The fact remains that our school district is currently living beyond our means."

Smith was among the six board members to vote in favor of the cuts, with Franci Schwartz providing the only objection.

"My fear, by the vote we just took, is that we lost the cooperation of our community," lamented Schwartz, whose concerns were affirmed by Schlueter.

"I believe they just lost..."