

Dear Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the Ohio EdChoice Scholarship Program. Our three sons are current recipients of EdChoice – two in the low-income expansion program and one in the traditional program due to our local elementary school being placed on the qualifying list last year. All three of our children have thrived academically and socially because of the option we have been empowered with to send them to Lake Center Christian School in Hartville, Ohio.

To witness such tremendous growth in our boys at school is a joy and benefit we had not always thought possible. When our oldest son reached kindergarten age six years ago, we knew that our local public school would not be a good option for him, so we started homeschooling. However, by the time he reached 2nd Grade, it became increasingly clear that he was not thriving in a homeschool setting.

We began to explore other options. This included applying to our public school system's collaborative Montessori school, which relies on an annual lottery to select an extremely limited number of students per year. Disappointingly, but not surprisingly, he was not one of the random few. We also contacted a neighboring school district but were told that even though our home is just barely outside their limits and our family business located directly in their district, they did not allow open enrollment. Plus, annual tuition would be not much less than our local private school.

At the time, we were still in the financially stressful early years of starting up our upholstery business and raising three small children. We were in no position to move, and our options were limited. When it came to choosing the best path for our son, we felt trapped. This is a horrible, helpless feeling no parent should ever experience when it comes to their child's education.

Our last option was to check out our local private school – Lake Center Christian School. As Christians, we would have liked to consider this school first, but we assumed we would never be able to afford it. However, seeing our son still struggling halfway through 2nd Grade at home finally made us contact the school for a tour.

After we visited the school, we knew that was where we wanted our son to attend. We felt we would do whatever it took to make that happen. And we did. For the remaining five months he was officially enrolled in 2nd Grade, we utilized whatever resources we could, from Jay working countless hours a week at the upholstery shop and various side jobs, to me (Anne) cashing in every savings bond I had been saving from my grandpa each Christmas since I was a little girl - all this while trying to maintain a stable home environment for our children. Although we were proud of the sacrifice we made to see our son blossom at his new school, we were thoroughly exhausted and worried about how we could afford putting him through 3rd Grade the following year.

Imagine our relief when we learned that we could apply for an EdChoice Expansion Scholarship. When we received the official acceptance letter, we felt a tremendous weight had been lifted and that for the first time in a very long struggle to make our family and small business succeed, something was actually going right for us. Our school principal told us that Ohio was an excellent state for supporting educational options, and we felt proud and grateful to live here, own and operate a small business, and raise a family of Buckeyes to the best of our ability.

We now have three sons enrolled at Lake Center Christian School who benefit from the Ohio EdChoice Programs. These programs have helped us not only manage the fluctuating economic stress of owning

and operating a small business while raising a family, but more importantly, they have empowered us to send our children to a school where they not only flourish academically and socially, but are instilled daily with values such as kindness, compassion, respect, responsibility, and service to the local community and world.

To see our children grow and achieve so much through a program that has helped thousands of families for years, only to have it ripped away by a frantic piece of legislation would be devastating, not only for our family but for thousands of parents already sacrificing to do what's best for their children.

We respectfully urge you to keep the EdChoice Scholarship Programs a viable option for Ohio's families. The strongest allies you can equip in strengthening Ohio are dedicated parents empowered to choose what is best for their children. There is no better investment in the future than educating each child according to their needs. Educational choice is essential to making this commitment to Ohio's future possible.

Thank you for your time and service.

Sincerely,

Jay and Anne Johnson

Canton, Ohio