

Chair Jones, Vice-Chair Huffman, Sen. Fedor, Sen. Peterson, Rep. Edwards, and Rep. Robinson:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to your Ohio House & Senate Education Conference Committee contemplating the vital remedy to the current state voucher policy. My name is Maureen Reedy, and I am a retired public-school teacher and current substitute teacher for Columbus City Schools. I am also a graduate of Columbus City Schools, Eastmoor High School and the Ohio State University. I have been an active advocate for Ohio's public-schools, its teachers and students since serving as the Ohio Teacher of the Year in 2002. I am also a co-founder and board member for *Public Education Partners*, a statewide advocacy group for public school districts and the children and families that they serve.

Sometimes the perfect moment arrives by chance. On January 29th, Ohio students were on stage in the State House celebrating their public schools while the Ohio House voted, 93 – 0, to reject the Senate EdChoice private school voucher bill. As chance would have it, legislators on lunch breaks witnessed the priceless benefits of public education; confident, joyous students sharing literature, music, art, dance, technology and career education projects in front of proud parents and community members.

Nearly 90 % of Ohio's children attend public schools. Voters have never approved funding private school tuition with public property tax dollars. The Ohio Constitution stipulates state funding for public schools, not private schools.

Why should we continue diverting public school funding to private schools that score consistently lower on state tests than their public-school counterparts? A study of Ohio's EdChoice program found that voucher participants performed worse on state tests compared with their closely matched peers in public schools. It makes no sense to charge public schools with the financial burden of supporting lower performing private school tuition when Ohio's public-school districts are strapped for cash. Property taxes are ballooning with increased levies necessary to cover rising public-school funds diverted to pay for private school tuition.

In fact, funneling resources from public schools to pay for the expanding voucher program has taken the very funding for wraparound services that Governor DeWine pushed through in the last state budget to help Ohio's most vulnerable students. Taking public school dollars means larger class sizes, reduced curriculum offerings, and fewer dollars to address the health and wellness of our students.

Fundamentally flawed, the current performance based EdChoice voucher program is based on the state report card system which both Republican and Democrat legislators have deemed as "broken." The way the law is written, a school can be considered "failing" and subject to vouchers even if it has an A, B or C as an overall grade on the report card. This is egregious and has serious financial consequences for the majority of Ohio's public-school districts.

At the very least, a compromise must be reached. Thankfully, the Ohio House has passed a bill to stop the funds pouring out of public schools to pay for vouchers. Instead, the state would fund the new voucher program separately, based on family income rather than performance, taking care of the poorest students in Ohio first.

Continuing to drain vital local funds for private school tuition is unsustainable for Ohio's public-school districts. Above all, Ohio's poorest districts need to hang on to every dollar for in-school medical, emotional and social supports for students living day to day with poverty, trauma and addiction in their homes. All eyes are on the Senate to join with the House in restoring reason and sanity to the private school voucher program in Ohio. Vouchers should not victimize Ohio's public-school children.

Maureen Reedy: 101 Westwood Road; Columbus, Ohio 43214; 614-581-6690