



February 12, 2020

Chairman Jones and Members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

My name is Chris Steinmann and I am the Superintendent of the Cleveland Lutheran High School Association. It is an honor to be here today to speak on House Bill 9.

On behalf of the more than 800 students and families whom I represent, I want to lend our strong support to the policies in House Bill 9. Those policies simultaneously build the strength and credibility of our public schools while preserving the ability of families to choose the education their children will receive. It is a fantastic example of legislation that is a win both for families and for the public schools who are understandably concerned about the state report card system and the impact it has on their community.

Over the past few months, there has been plenty of conversation about the explosive growth in the number of schools who are labeled as underperforming as a result of the state report card. I am troubled that the reaction has centered around cutting educational choices for families instead of repairing the state report card. If the issue is that schools are being improperly classified, we should fix the classification system before moving ahead on anything else. Why is that not the first step towards fixing our system? I believe that part of fixing that grading system should include grading schools such as those I represent, schools who participate in EdChoice and the Cleveland Scholarship. Instead, the debate seems to be centered around how to cut a program that is having a tremendous impact on students all around the state.

At the schools that I represent, there are more than 500 students who use an Ohio Department of Education scholarship to pay their tuition. Over the past five years, we have graduated 98% of our students. 95% of those graduates have been accepted to colleges and universities, with over 90% enrolling in college within a year of graduating. 73% of our graduates finish college within six years. All of those statistics are well above the Ohio and national averages. School choice has enabled students to receive a premier education which they could not get otherwise. Both EdChoice and the Cleveland Scholarship are paving the way for the long-term success of these students and their families.

I know that there are competing bills from the House and the Senate on how to best address the current EdChoice system. I would plead with this committee to rethink the ideas in Senate Bill 89. The changes to the EdChoice system proposed in that bill would be harmful to students and families all across our state.

First and foremost, there is simply not enough funding in that bill to accommodate the demand for scholarships. I read with interest comments from members of the House of Representatives that there is a clear link between underperforming schools and poverty. The majority of schools that have been

Christ-centered living. We teach it. We believe it.

labeled underperforming for years have been in poor neighborhoods. Those students have historically qualified for EdChoice. If suddenly EdChoice is removed from the equation, many of those families will be applying for the new Buckeye Opportunity Scholarship. The demand from current families using EdChoice Expansion plus the families who traditionally received EdChoice will overwhelm the resources allocated in SB 89. Thousands of students who want a true educational option will be denied it because of a lack of allocated funding. How would being denied a scholarship help those low-income families?

I also represent middle-class families on both sides of Cleveland who chose to move into cities and help revitalize the housing stock in areas such as Euclid, Warrensville Heights, East Cleveland, Elyria, and Lorain. They want to help rebuild the city and they knew that they would qualify for an EdChoice scholarship due to the performance of schools in those areas. They have children who are about to begin school in the next few years whom they are expecting scholarships for. Those families will not be able to afford private school without an EdChoice Scholarship. These are not wealthy people. They are middle-class and will not qualify at the proposed guidelines. They will end up moving away from the area they were hoping to help revitalize - something which is damaging to both their family and the cities they are in. I speak from experience, as this is now a debate that my wife and I are having. Should middle-class families be excluded from school choice in the future, we will be moving out of the area we have been working to build up.

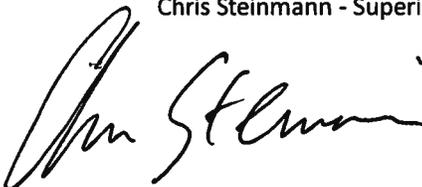
The new Buckeye Opportunity Scholarship system created by SB 89 would tell a family of 4 in Warrensville Heights who makes \$65,601 per year that their only options are to send their two high school students to a school that has been failing for years or to spend more than one-quarter of their yearly pre-tax income on a high-quality high school. The same story will be playing out in cities such as Euclid, East Cleveland, Elyria, and many others. That is a terrible position to put families in.

Lastly, if the Legislature wants to move to an income-only based scholarship, it will need to choose to either increase the dollar amount of the scholarship or increase the income guidelines. Most private schools around the state lose money by accepting low-income EdChoice students. The budget is balanced by middle-class families who pay the tuition difference and contribute to the school. If those families can no longer receive a scholarship, they won't be able to afford the education. Many private schools will not be able to make the numbers work without an increase to the scholarship amount and will struggle to stay open. Ironically, the supposed school choice system may result in less school options open to families.

In summary, SB 89 would be harmful to students, communities, and to the schools who serve them. In order to work, it will need far more money allocated to it, along with higher scholarship amounts and a more generous income guideline. As a state, we should be incentivizing strong student outcomes such as those seen in the Cleveland Lutheran High School Association. House Bill 9 does that while keeping an eye towards stabilizing our public schools. I ask that you please support it and move away from SB 89.

Thank you for your time.

Chris Steinmann - Superintendent & CEO, Cleveland Lutheran High School Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Steinmann". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over the typed name.