

Members of the Conference Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today regarding vouchers.

I'm, Jim Posch and I'm two-time elected School Board Member from the Cleveland Heights – University Heights School City District.

Cleveland Heights is ranked number 6 in the state for total EdChoice deductions. We are also number 1 in the state for the highest percentage of our state funding taken for EdChoice. 33 percent of our state funding goes toward EdChoice.

The 5 districts above us on the list are BIG urban districts with unique issues. What you need to know - we're a REGULAR (somewhat average) district with 51 hundred students. We've been struggling with EdChoice for years. Now with EdChoice expansion, the newly impacted districts are looking at us as the bellwether of things to come for their community.

We have a newly renovated 100 Million Dollar high school. Our graduation rate is well above the state average. We have a very diverse population of students including a high than average concentration of special needs children.

Last year our Seniors earned 12.1 Million in college scholarships. We're one of 9 school districts in state honored by the College Board with placement on their Annual District Honor Roll. But when you look at the state report card our "C" grade puts us on the bottom 17% of Ohio districts, but the same state data ranks us above average.

Our building was designated an EdChoice building because of the 2015 HB 64 Safe Harbor legislation. Essentially because of data dating back to

2012, this school was labeled underperforming. Some in our community who don't value public schools use this as an excuse to call it a failing school, when in fact it's not.

My first ASK of you today is to abolish the report cards. It's a disservice to all who live in Ohio and it only promotes misinformation about what's already good in Ohio.

To be clear, EdChoice was enacted to give Ohio Families a choice if they were attending a failing school.

This is not only a Cleveland Heights problem. Last year 500 schools were on the EdChoice list. Now over 12-hundred schools are on the list representing over 2/3-rds of all districts. It's slated to grow even bigger next year.

EdChoice is not about failing schools. Do 2/3-rds of Ohio districts have failing schools? Of course not. Funny thing is – in North Eastern Ohio, some of the A-graded districts are on the list! For years we've been saying State Report Cards are flawed, this certainly helps demonstrate that craziness.

My second ASK of you today is to get real about EdChoice.

Lobbyists will say - EdChoice is cheaper for a community because students will flee the public schools, take a voucher and go to a private or religious school at a lower cost.

THEY are wrong. Students are not fleeing our school because of EdChoice. Our of 51-hundred enrollment remains steady, it even increased a bit last year. But there are over 14-hundred students taking

vouchers. 94% of these students were NEVER enrolled nor attended our schools.

The thing is, for many years standings our community continually embraces school choice. My children play side by side with our friends who attend religious and private schools. While my two children received a GREAT education in our PUBLIC Schools, I'm a private school product.

So now with vouchers – our district is either fully or partially financially responsible for educating our 51-hundred children AND those 14-hundred additional children using vouchers. Again 94% of these 14-hundred children NEVER attended our schools and for the most part because of religious NEVER would.

Even before Vouchers and EdChoice - the way we fund schools in Ohio is unsustainable. This is the reason why we rely on the passage of School Levies. This why school funding was ruled unconstitutional because it relies too heavily on Property Taxes.

Now with Vouchers and EdChoice – we're still faced with unsustainable funding, but now we have to pay for EdChoice on top of everything else.

We have a community killing school Levy on the ballot next month because of Vouchers and EdChoice. This is going to be a hard one to get passed. Our community is tapped out.

But the Levy is also in jeopardy because of the uncertainty of Voucher legislation.

Over 5 million in cuts are needed if we don't pass a Levy this year.

We wouldn't need any Levy if it wasn't for Vouchers and EdChoice.

Last year our State Aid deduction was \$4.2 Million, this year it's now \$7 million. We know it's going to grow again next year. This continues to be unsustainable.

When we visit the Capital and the Ohio Department of Education – we continually hear about the “Unintended Consequences” of Voucher and EdChoice legislation that has put districts like ours in peril.

This is “things to come” for all Ohio school districts. As Vouchers and EdChoice expand, your school district is next.

If the Legislature feels to need to fund private and religious schools, then please do it separately outside of our State Aid.

Today for every new student that uses a voucher, 100% of that voucher costs is coming out of our property taxes.

Our data shows these students using a vouchers are not coming from the public schools, they're not fleeing a failing school, but they indirectly taking monies from our children.

These children using the vouchers are members of my community and they're good kids. But so are our kids who are losing their funding because of the vouchers.

My last ASK of you today is to please help us.

The last minute changes from July's budget process cost us over \$2 Million ANNUALLY. We're just one school district.

The \$30 Million in HB 9 and \$10 Million in SB 89 spread across all Ohio Schools isn't enough of a fix to help the over \$7 million State Aid deduction we're forced to address annually.

Labeling more and more buildings as failing, when they're not, only makes Ohio a less desirable.

I understand the desire to expand the availability of vouchers and make them an entitlement, but please fund these vouchers outside of our State Aid.

Thank you for listening to me and the voices of our community.