

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Conference Committee of House Bill 9, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 9. My name is Jodi Sourini and I'm the President of the Board of Education for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

My district has the heart-breaking distinction of being #1. In the state of Ohio, the children of my district are giving up the highest percentage of their state funding to pay for other children's private tuition via EdChoice.

I want to present to you how vouchers are impacting our community. The amount being deducted from our school district annually to fund vouchers is increasing at an alarming rate. This year alone, more than \$7 million dollars (or 33% of our state funding) has been deducted from our budget to pay for private school tuition. This is not sustainable.

I'm here today to provide some examples of how vouchers impact individual children. Prior to the most recent biennial budget which froze education funding, CH-UH schools received \$2,167 in state funding per pupil. But an EdChoice voucher for a student in Kindergarten through 8th grade is \$4,650. It's important to understand where the rest of the money comes from to cover the cost of the voucher.

Let's assume we have Student A and Student B. Each receives \$2,167 in state funding. Student A attends CH-UH schools and Student B decides to take a voucher. The voucher amount is \$4,650. This means 100% of Student B's state funding is deducted from the CH-UH budget to pay the private school's tuition. But that's NOT enough.

In addition to ALL of Student B's state funding, 100% of Student A's state funding is ALSO deducted from the CH-UH budget. This leaves Student A with zero state funding. And yet, that's still not enough money to cover the voucher. A third student, Student C, who also attends CH-UH gets \$2,167 in state funding. An additional \$316 of Student C's state funds have to move to Student B for the voucher. While Student B now has the full \$4,650 for the voucher, CH-UH is left with only \$1,851 in state funding to go towards the education of both Students A and C. (See Exhibit A)

The impact is even more severe in the case of high school vouchers. A voucher for a student in grades 9-12 is \$6,000. In effect, CH-UH schools receive \$0 state funding for student A and only \$501 for Student C when Student B takes a high school voucher. We still have more than 5,000 students to educate. Our local taxes have to offset these losses in state funding. (See Exhibit B)

A little over 1,400 students who live in our district are using the EdChoice voucher. 94% of those students have never been enrolled in nor have attended our schools. This indicates that many of these students were not fleeing a failing school. They never intended on attending public school regardless what grade we receive on the state report card. Many in our community who choose private schools do so for cultural or religious reasons. We are a community that is proud to be diverse and inclusive.

I know I just threw a lot of numbers at you. If you're wondering why I'm sharing this with you, it's because if it weren't for EdChoice, we would not have to be asking our community for a levy until 2023. And even then, the millage we would have to ask for would be significantly less.

As you consider House Bill 9 and work with your Senate colleagues to reconcile with the bill they are proposing in Senate Bill 89, I respectfully ask you to please consider these four factors:

1. Performance-based EdChoice vouchers make it extremely difficult for public school districts to plan and budget. I ask you to please transition 100% of vouchers to income-based so EdChoice vouchers are funded from state funds directly. Do not deduct funds from local school districts.

2. I realize the state needs to be able to plan and budget as well. If you need to phase in Income-based vouchers over time, please eliminate any clauses that would guarantee performance-based vouchers to the siblings of children who currently receive a voucher. Once again, this language makes it nearly impossible for public school districts to plan and budget. Guaranteeing performance-based vouchers to students who currently use them already ensures the drain of money from public schools for 12 more years until the 2032-33 school year.

3. Please reinstate the requirement that a high school student who takes a voucher must first have attended a public school.

4. I thank our legislators, especially Speaker of the House Larry Householder, who finally acknowledge that our state report card system is inherently flawed. I'm asking you to correct the damage these report cards have inflicted on local communities. Please reimburse districts for voucher costs we've incurred due to the unvetted expansion that occurred in this year's biennial budgeting process.

In closing, I want to reiterate, we are NOT losing students to EdChoice. We are losing MONEY to EdChoice. Thank you for listening.

(See Exhibit A and Exhibit B on next page)

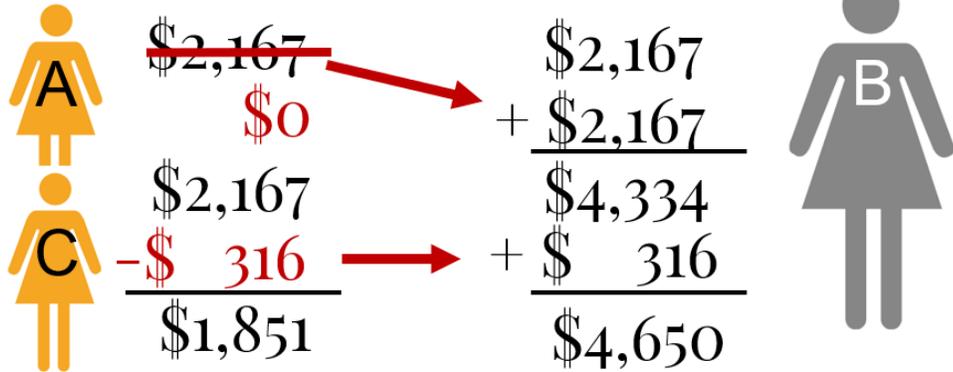
Exhibit A



EdChoice Kindergarten-8th Grade Example*

Takes EdChoice Voucher

Attend CH-UH Schools



*Prior to 2019-2020

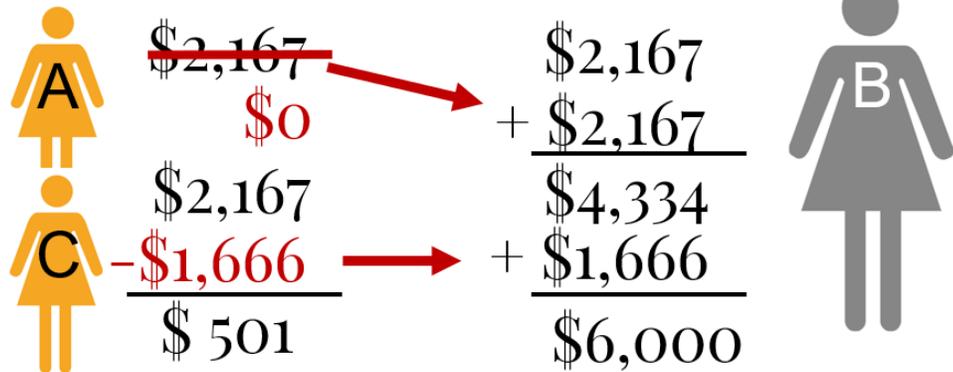
Exhibit B



EdChoice 9th - 12th Grade Example

Takes EdChoice Voucher

Attend CH-UH Schools



*Prior to 2019-2020