

Testimony

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Talawanda City School District School Board member

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I am offering testimony to urge support for SB 89, the House-approved fix for the EdChoice Scholarship program. Without further amendment, this program is on its way to causing extreme and long-lasting damage to education provision in the state of Ohio. I appreciate your time and efforts to fix EdChoice.

I am a School Board Member as well as parent and taxpayer in the Talawanda City School District. We are a small district, with around 3,000 students, five schools, and by square miles, one of the largest districts in the state. Transportation is a big cost.

Like all public schools, we proudly serve the great diversity of children that walk through our doors. We educate students who come from poverty and students who come from rich homes; students of Miami University faculty and staff, students of farmers, mechanics, nurses, and those seeking jobs. We educate the students who need advanced academic instruction, students who have diagnosed disabilities, and those who have profound developmental challenges.

Our district brings all those children together in the same schools, classrooms, and sports fields not simply because we are required by law to do so.

We educate all children because that is what public schools do. They bring diverse citizens together to become a public, educated to work together in our communities, jobs, and for the public good.

If Ed Choice moves forward as written, most public schools in this state will soon be in fiscal jeopardy, some sooner rather than later. This law will diminish our ability to be able to serve all children who are educated in our schools, because private schools will certainly not accept all the students who walk through our doors. They will leave behind those harder to education, those students who for no fault of their own need more support and more educational services than other students do.

In addition, there is the funding disaster that will be created by the EdChoice program as currently coded into law. The Talawanda City Schools receive \$1,400 per student from the state funding model. One of our schools, Bogan Elementary, will fall under the EdChoice Scholarship option as required by the law. The EdChoice Scholarship will provide students at Bogan Elementary with a \$4,500/year (for grades K-8), which increases to \$6,000 in high school grades — which means that our district would have to provide the difference between the state funding amount and the scholarship amounts.

Our district would be paying to educate children in private schools who live in the Bogan catchment area yet who have never attended Bogan Elementary at all and whose parents have already opted for private or home schooling. A 2016 Indiana Department of Education [study found](#) that over half of the students using voucher scholarships had never attended a public school at all.

My tax dollars, as a district resident, would be supplementing the private, likely religious school attendance of that Bogan student — a school which has very little public accountability. How can this be legal, let alone constitutional?

Talawanda City Schools, like all public schools, is run on a tight budget, requiring extremely careful management. Right now, we are operating at a 4% deficit and looking for ways to trim costs so that we can postpone an operating levy. Operating levies are notoriously difficult to pass here. They will become impossible to pass as citizens come to understand that their operating levies are going to scholarship money for students in private schools.

EdChoice makes no sense. Ohio public schools want to be held accountable but the report card system now in place is not a good measurement, only serving to punish public schools — the only schools who will educate all children to be citizens of our communities.

Thank you for trying to fix EdChoice. Please support SB 89 as the right remedy.

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