

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Conference Committee for House Bill 9, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Malia Lewis and I am an elected member of the School Board of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City Schools. I take very seriously my responsibility to these students; their advocacy does them, their families, and their teachers credit.

Our District serves a community well known for its diversity and inclusion. We welcome and embrace residents of different religions, races, backgrounds, nationalities, and social classes.

Our community has always offered school choice because we have a vast array of private and parochial schools in the Heights. There is something for everyone and we prize the diversity of our people and our schools.

As a result, the current method for funding EdChoice vouchers is disproportionately affecting our District's budget. Last summer, when the Governor signed the current biennial budget, we lost 33% of our state funding to EdChoice vouchers. With that stroke of a pen, Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School lost \$7 Million. We currently have 1416 students using EdChoice vouchers, only 90 of whom have ever attended one of our public schools. That means that 94% of the voucher users have never attended a public school. So it is unreasonable that those vouchers should come from the public school system's budget.

Last year CH-UH only received \$2167 per student from the state. A voucher costs us \$4650 or \$6000 depending on the student's grade level. The difference is made up from money intended to educate the District's students, leaving less money available for those who use the public schools. Because of the two year freeze on state funds to public school districts, every new voucher this year and next is taking away all the funds for at least 2 public school students (2-3/4 students in the case of a high school voucher). This is not sustainable. No community can raise its real estate taxes high enough to make up for this budget deficit. And there is the obvious problem that local real estate taxes intended for public education are now going to parochial schools, in violation of the separation of church and state.

There are many specific points which we could haggle over in House Bill 9, but the basic point is this: all EdChoice vouchers should be income based; and all EdChoice vouchers should be paid from a separate pot of state money so that they do not undermine the viability of public school districts. After all, 90% of Ohio's children attend public school. Their education should not be compromised because of a flawed funding mechanism for the 10% who attend private or religious schools. You can fix this by funding EdChoice vouchers directly from state money, instead of from public school district funds.

Thank you.