

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 9
TO
THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE OF THE OHIO HOUSE AND SENATE

BY

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**Chairman Jones, Representatives Edwards and Robinson,
and Senators Fedor, Huffman and Peterson:**

I am here today on behalf of the North Olmsted Board of Education. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 9.

The City of North Olmsted is a western suburb of Cuyahoga County. It is a community dedicated to quality education and there is a great sense of pride within the school system itself. We focus on core academic instruction, professional development for high-yield instructional practices, and assessments, giving our students the best possible opportunities for success as an adult.

Our four-year graduation rate hovers around 95% annually and our students typically score above the state average on the ACT.

North Olmsted is also a district that has never opposed high-quality choice. However, we cannot be silent when the state proposes to boost funding for private education, through increases to the income-based EdChoice Voucher program, while it continues to strip resources away from our district.

For example, in the last three years alone, the North Olmsted City Schools lost \$5.7 Million in what would have been Tangible Personal Property tax revenue.

We had to redirect \$1.6 Million from our general funds to mostly poor performing charter schools.

The percentage of our transportation costs funded by the state during the last three years was cut by 25%, costs that are sure to escalate if we are forced to transport more voucher recipients.

We also absorbed nearly \$470,000 of the cost to purchase eight new school buses --- an amount that previously would have been reimbursed by the state.

And the difference between Catastrophic Special Needs costs that were eligible for reimbursement the state and what was actually received by our district over the past three years represented a shortfall of more than \$920,000.

By the way, the federal government hasn't helped much either, reneging on nearly \$4 Million dollars annually that it promised to help cover the cost associated with the IDEA mandate.

This year, North Olmsted has 570 special needs students and 222 English Language Learners. Most of these students will not likely be admitted to private schools receiving additional income-based vouchers. But they are children who could certainly be helped by students vouchers might peel away.

Scott Starcher is a North Olmsted graduate whose story was told in the Cleveland Plain Dealer a few years ago. Scott has cerebral palsy. His mother was told that Scott would be a burden because he would probably never be able to walk or talk. However, his mother moved to North Olmsted so Scott could be enrolled in a district with a reputation for caring for

every student, no matter the need. She said North Olmsted “saved him.”

According to Scott, he succeeded because the teachers believed in him, but also because classmates with more abilities than he supported and encouraged him. Scott is married today and works at the local Target store.

Therefore, the notion that more money is available for income-based vouchers is troubling when so many public school districts are being asked to do more with less. This is especially true when there is no evidence that such choices provide a superior education.

As I’m sure you know, a study commissioned by the Fordham Institute a few years ago found that students who received vouchers in Ohio scored worse in math and English assessments than their peers in public schools, including many voucher students who were better off financially and academically than the classmates they left behind.

This phenomenon is actually not unique to Ohio. Studies of voucher programs in Washington, DC, Indiana, Wisconsin and Louisiana produced similar results.

However, Ohio might be setting itself apart in that House Bill 166 provisions appear to quash any such comparisons by now allowing voucher recipients to take different assessments than their public school counterparts.

This is another issue with recent EdChoice Voucher changes that our district hoped would be corrected with House Bill 9, or Senate Bill 89, which we do support.

And while private school and voucher advocates say their schools offer more enriching opportunities for students

outside of the core curriculum, such as service learning, North Olmsted recently demonstrated a noteworthy example of learning beyond the classroom.

Four 8th-grade students at North Olmsted Middle School were credited with finding the unmarked graves of several African-Americans buried long ago in a North Olmsted cemetery. This was part of a class project last year jointly run by their English and History teachers.

The students' research efforts led to the placement of a marker at the gravesite, an accomplishment recognized by local radio and TV stations, as well as the New York Times.

North Olmsted does not have buildings eligible for the performance-based vouchers in the current version of House Bill 9. So our students don't deserve to have the teaching and learning they're accustomed to be compromised by dwindling investments from the state, nor by having more public tax dollars simultaneously diverted to private institutions.

That is why we encourage this Conference Committee to reinvest in traditional public schools in Ohio, and not expand income-based vouchers beyond the current level, if more funds are available for K-12 education.

It is why the members of the North Olmsted Board of Education urge this Conference Committee not to approve House Bill 9 as currently written.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have.