

Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers

HB 9 Conference Committee

Monday, February 17, 2020

Benjamin Alexander, High School English Teacher in Columbus City Schools

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Benjamin Alexander. I am in my third year teaching freshman English in Columbus City Schools and a proud graduate of Columbus City Schools.

I started teaching right after college. I was driven to it because I've seen firsthand how a great education is the foundation of a successful life. I was driven to it despite the negative stereotypes associated with the profession: the low pay, the long hours, and the limited resources available to teachers in my district.

Teaching is one of my greatest joys in life. I love coming to school every day and seeing the bright faces of my students. That's why it breaks my heart that my kids come to school and try to learn in a building in disrepair. There is no air conditioning to provide relief from the heat. In the winter, many teachers teach in rooms with heaters that do not work. Our technology is outdated. The walls of our school are disintegrating. And the heartbreaking thing is that my kids are aware of it. They know that there's a nicer school down the street where students are learning comfortably, and they know that the difference between themselves and those kids is money.

Performance-based EdChoice vouchers drain resources from the budgets of local school districts. If the state continues to hand out these vouchers, then more and more of the money that is so valuably needed to fix my school and so many schools like mine will start to disappear. This puts undue pressure on the taxpayers to pass school levies to fund schools. The only way that my building can get upgraded heating and cooling is if we turn to the taxpayers of Columbus and beg them to pass a levy. And I believe that the education and wellbeing of my students is too important to leave up to chance like that.

If the state prioritizes vouchers based on income, it will mean that more money will stay in the budgets of local school districts. That means there will be more money available to renovate the buildings like mine in Columbus City Schools and other districts that are in desperate need of updating. A world where all students can get a great education at a great school is possible. I hope the committee reaches a decision that benefits all students in Ohio.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your consideration. I am available to respond to any questions you may have.