

Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers
HB 9 Concerence Committee
Monday, February 17, 2020
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Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

Thank you for being here on this holiday. My mother was a nurse and my father was a teacher, so I grew up seeing my role models working odd hours. Thank you to my union sisters and brothers who were able to be here with us today and to all the other friends of public education.

Do you like hand me downs? Well, it depends, doesn't it? Grandpa's antique pocket watch is one thing, but his old suspenders are another. As a history teacher, I have a fondness for old things. Or maybe because I have a fondness for old things, I'm a history teacher.

This book is a hand me down. The History of Our World: The Early Ages by Prentice Hall, belongs to Columbus City Schools. It has also belonged to Marawel, Shankaron, Tyshandra, Will, Brooklyn, Michael, Demetriona, and students who passed through Mifflin before I ever arrived. It was copyrighted in 2008, when Barack Obama was still a Senator and my students were in diapers. You might be asking yourself, so what? What has changed about Ancient History in twelve years? Since this book was published, a ship that plunged to the bottom of the Black Sea has been found, Aristotle's tomb discovered, and the librarians of Timbuktu fought to preserve and share forgotten manuscripts of the ancient world from ISIS in Africa.

Beyond the cycle of discovery and rediscovery, what message are we sending to children? There are citizens who scoff at your work, who say, "Why do we need new laws?" and "They're all a bunch of crooks anyways." Those people underestimate your work, the fact that there are always more people needing help, new facts to discover, and great innovations to incorporate into our society. They look down at the idea of self-governance, despite the marble columns, the bronze statues, and your best efforts.

Part of that work now is weighing SB 89 and HB 9. And the choices you make will have a very real effect on the students I look at every day. I'll come back to that choice again, but I want to tell you that your vote will matter to the children who hold this book.

But when we care about what we do, trying to convince others of the necessity of this great experiment doesn't always feel laborious. It can be inspiring. Forgive the students who have a little difficulty in seeing that dream when the chairs they sit on are broken, the linoleum floor is peeling and the textbook is being held together with tape. So my job isn't just updating students on archaeological finds or tracing back the protests in Ferguson to protests in Birmingham to protests in Rome. The book might be falling apart, but the ideas that live in it matter. I show these students the ideas of a fallen gladiator mattered, and that Spartacus lives on, King lives on, and they will live on. They matter.

\$28,400,000 was taken from my students in one year. My students are losing tens of millions every year to schools where children fall further behind. I've watched these students transfer into Mifflin, staggered by the expectations we hold for our students. Correcting those missteps takes time and money, resources that SB 89 will allow us to keep. Let us do what is best for our students.

Maybe I should have led with Mifflin Middle School's accolades. Maybe I should have led with the A's in Value Added, the State Board of Education giving us their Momentum Award, followed by the High Progress Award in 2019. But that's just what other people say about us. I tell the students what I told my daughters, Jocelyn and Sophia, when they were young. Tests are just one data point, one day of your life. When we take care of our business every day, the tests fall into line. But Mifflin's business was never really about the MAP, the SLO, the AIR. It's about the work we put in. Make it easier for our kids to get to work. Don't take funding from them, don't burden their teachers, when we already have so many things we want to do for our kids. We are teaching them the nobility of scholarship and achievement, but that lesson can ring a little hollow when the heat's not running and the internet has crashed.

SB 89 will staunch the bleeding of our schools, these great incubators of economic and democratic power. HB 9 will continue to leach resources from 90% of Ohio's children. My colleagues in the suburbs are right to fear the encroachment of Statehouse policies that have devastated a generation within Ohio's urban districts. I see the millions of dollars lost to our students when Sarmilla gets her long black hair stuck in the broken plastic chair that is as old as me. When Noah has to scrub extra hard to clean the battered white board past due for replacement, I see the dollars stolen from us. And yes, my students and I have to laugh when the spring wind blows hard against the windows and the thrumming of its old plexiglass panels sounds like a cow's moo interrupting our lesson. But we can't always laugh. After we finish watching a documentary about the children of Birmingham rebelling in 1963 because of their segregated schools and hand me down equipment, when I move on to the ancient Greeks and I ask Demetriona to get her textbook, a part of me is angry at seeing her hold this hand me down in 2020.

These children don't just learn about Athens. They learn about how to handle their anger, how to do the right thing. And that is why we are here on this holiday. We are here to do the right thing. Choose SB 89.

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