

House Bill 9 Conference Committee
House Bill 9 Testimony
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Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present my written testimony to you regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Dr. Ed Klein, and while I serve as the Assistant Superintendent of Chardon Local Schools, I am offering testimony as a parent with children enrolled in the Riverside Local Schools and as a citizen residing in the 61st House District.

I am disappointed that the Ohio legislature has pursued inequitable reallocation of my tax dollars in the guise of school choice.

As a family, my wife and I decided early on to enroll our children in private school. This was a personal decision - one undertaken free from the interaction and interference from the state government.

We used our choice; no one, no agency, and no government, impacted our ability to choose. Choice was not, and has never been, the issue. To suggest otherwise, to suggest that the current legislation is a response to protect choice is - quite frankly - a strawman argument.

As a family, my wife and I understood that in exercising our choice, we were undertaking an expense. This was our choice. As consumers in a capitalist society, we exercised that choice.

But we also understood that as citizens of a republic, the law clearly calls for specific services to be provided by the citizenry for the good of all: among these, public education. And we chose to enroll our children in our local school district.

In 1787, the federal government through the Northwest Ordinance - the very piece of federal legislation which saw the creation of the state of Ohio - called for local lands and funds to be set aside for public education: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to a good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

Similarly, our forefathers, authoring our state constitution, ensured that public education would be a publicly-financed service of the state of Ohio. Article IV, section 2 of Ohio's Constitution reads: "The General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state; but no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state."

Much ado - with nary effective legislation - has been made over the past thirty years regarding the clause "thorough and efficient." However, with regards to pending EdChoice legislation, our state Constitution notes that "no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state."

In essence, through the creation and implementation of EdChoice vouchers, this legislature is not only abrogating its legal responsibility - once again - to respond to the findings of DeRolph, it is now undermining the Constitution in a new manner - by providing right and control of school funds to religious and other sects.

As a parent who chose both private and public education for my children, I am dismayed that this legislature would seek to provide public dollars for religious and other sects, in direct defiance of our state Constitution. This action is nothing short, on the part of this legislature, to actively dismantle the very system of public education which has been legally established in and for our state since before its inception.

Furthermore, as a parent who chose both private and public education for my children, I encourage my elected officials to cease avoiding the legal responsibility to establish a "thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state," and to respond to the findings of DeRolph.

Specifically in my community - the Riverside Local Schools in Lake County (House District 61), our public school district receives \$8,351,709 from the state for base funding based upon 4,639 students. This calculates to about \$1,900 per student.

However, with the consideration of EdChoice vouchers, Riverside Local Schools could lose \$6,000 per student.

What accounts for the disparity in what the state legislature is considering requiring the local tax payer to pay (nearly \$6,000 per student) with the lesser amount the state allocates (approximately \$1,900 per student)?

The state of Ohio uses a state share index in its funding formula for public schools. The state share index is a factor based upon land/property values per pupil and median income of the residents, determining how much the state allocates to school districts. The higher the median income and the higher the property values in a school district, the lower the percentage of state share and the less of the \$6,000 the school district receives.

Additionally, because the state cannot adequately fund its own formula, it caps growth to school districts. As a result, for all of the years that the community comprising Riverside Schools was growing, revenue from the state was capped, not at the formula, and not even at

the state share, but at approximately 2% of the value. As a result, Riverside Schools fell further and further behind the formula.

Specifically in the case of Riverside Local Schools, the district should be funded at 53% state share and receive over \$13.9 million in state dollars. But, because the district has been capped for revenue growth, it only receives \$8.4 million annually, or about 30% of the total share.

However, there are occasions when the state takes money out for “below the line” or adjustments outside the formula without regard for the cap or the state share. This is a wholesale deduction - at the whim of the state - of the whole \$6,000. This has occurred primarily with open enrollment and public charters. But, with the expansion of EdChoice vouchers, the deduction of the full state share (unfunded by the state) is devastating to the local tax base, and devastating to the local tax payer.

As a taxpayer, I am dismayed that my state legislature continues to refuse to address its Constitutional responsibility to provide a “thorough and efficient” system of public education; and instead of meeting that responsibility has instead focused its legislative efforts on expanding a system of publicly-funded private education in direct contradiction of our state Constitution.

Additionally, as a taxpayer, I am dismayed that the state legislature is allowing me to use my neighbor’s tax dollars to fund my child’s education in private - possibly religious - setting.

I encourage this Committee to limit the expansion of EdChoice vouchers, as they present clear violations both of our state Constitution and of our shared democratic-republic values and capitalist economic system.

Additionally, I encourage the state legislature to consider the work of the Cupp Patterson School Funding Workgroup as a response to providing a thorough and efficient system of funding public education in Ohio.

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