

Chairman Jones, and members of the House Bill 9 Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding how the EdChoice Voucher legislation impacts students residing in Washington Local Schools.

My name is Karen Mayfield and I am a Washington Local Board of Education member, a nineteen-year employee of Ottawa Hills Local Schools, and a mother of two public school teachers.

Sonia Sotomayor, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court said, *“Until we get equality in education, we don’t have an equal society.”*

I believe we are fully aware of the importance of equality, especially in education. However, I do not see equality demonstrated by either the EdChoice proposal or the private and parochial schools it benefits.

Unlike public schools, private and parochial schools can and do refuse to educate students based on socio-economic status, religion, physical or mental disability, ethnicity, and gender. This is not equality.

While I believe that parents are the best advocates for their children, they also deserve to be fully informed before deciding where to educate their child.

Last week, Mr. Kevin Bacon, CEO, President of School Choice Ohio said: *“I think the grade card is a good system. I think that the schools, most of the schools that are on the underperforming school list should be and those students should be eligible for a voucher.”*

Then Mr. Bacon should have no problem with the private and parochial schools that receive any public funding being required to follow the same legislation, taking the same state assessments, and providing their families and taxpayers with same local report card. That’s equality.

Washington Local Schools is a “District of Service” for three parochial schools, and is responsible for evaluating (initially) and re-evaluating (tri-annual review) every student with a disability or suspected disability. Because this serves our most vulnerable students, this is something we take very seriously.

We are required to evaluate and write IEPs for students we often never see and who have never stepped foot in one of our schools.

The EdChoice and special education scholarships are literally stealing district resources while funding programs with little to no oversight, and no assurance that the parochial students are receiving the educational supports they are entitled to. We are powerless to do anything about it, and there are no consequences for

the parochial school failing to meet the student's needs, other than the parent's choice to withdraw their student. However, the parochial schools still receive federal, state, and local funding for special education services that were never delivered. How is this good for children?

Regarding public schools providing the funding of EdChoice vouchers, Mr. Bacon also said, *"It's not their money, they'll get less of it, but it's not theirs to begin with."* I beg to differ.

Last fall, Washington Local Schools' administrators, staff, students, parents, and board members held neighborhood meetings, went door-to-door every day for months, working tirelessly - in all kinds of weather - to share our district's message to earn our community's support and passage of a large levy.

There were no private or parochial families or staff assisting us. Yet, with the current EdChoice Voucher program, they get to sit on the sidelines and receive \$750,000 from a levy our community worked so very hard to pass.

Again, I agree with a parent's right to choose where to educate their child. But they do not have the right to take money that is meant for students in Washington Local Schools. How does a child get more money to attend a private/parochial school than they would receive by attending their school of residence? This is not equality.

The most recent EdChoice proposal -- with the income-based voucher being funded by the state, and removing school eligibility based on a flawed report card -- is a small step in the right direction.

I urge this committee to continue working toward solutions for public school funding without catering to private interests. Demand accountability to protect and do what's best for children regardless of where they attend school. Every child deserves equality in education.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to share my comments with you today. I'll do my best to answer any questions you may have.