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Written Testimony before Ohio Conference Committee (HB9)

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Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Kevin Daberkow and I am thankful for the opportunity to talk very briefly before you today about the issue of the day which is the EdChoice program in the state of Ohio. I speak in opposition to the existence or expansion of the program because of the impact it will have on the students I teach at Southwood Elementary in Columbus, Ohio.

My background is quite average and regular. I am a schoolteacher. Next fall I will start my 20th year teaching on the South Side of Columbus in a beautiful school, Southwood Elementary. I teach 5th grade. I teach the most wonderful students from great families alongside of committed and passionate staff and a tireless and effective administrator. It is a calling to teach my students and I am thankful to God to have been given the privilege to enjoy such a rewarding career. All of our students are categorized as economically disadvantaged – 100%. Over a quarter of our students are categorized as having a disability. We accept all students regardless of disability. This is important to remember as I continue. As I stand here today, my students and their stories are heavy on my heart.

Because of my wife and I's commitment to support our oldest daughter's effort to avoid college debt, I also work two part-time jobs. I have worked part-time teaching in higher education for the past 15 years. I teach teachers in a master's degree program at Ohio University and I have just recently joined Franklin University's Doctor of Education program as a doctoral advisor.

Finally, it is important to also note that I am a Republican and a Conservative. Many times, those two labels are not the same so please know that I am a conservative first and foremost because that political perspective most closely aligns with my faith as a Christian. And my faith drives everything that I do.

I include my background in higher education because I believe research should drive what we do in the classroom. Research removes feelings and emotions and focuses on results. In education, as Grenny et al. (2013) might suggest in *The Influencer*, in education we routinely underwhelm overwhelming problems. Research can help us make sense of our problems in education and develop a path forward that meets the needs of students. All students. That is what our goal should be in public education.

My comments are focused on one consequence of the EdChoice program for my students. The consequences, as suggested in Arsen, DeLuca, Ni, and Bates (2015, as cited in Kaplan & Owings, 2019), are that students with special needs are disproportionately left behind in traditional public schools when their general education contemporaries leave taking with them EdChoice resources. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that a third of private schools have ZERO students with a disability. They further report that about 5% of private school students in parochial schools have disabilities. The majority of students (as a % of the total) with special needs are found in private schools that are not associated with a specific religious group. To create further confusion, there are reporting differences between public schools and private schools on this issue.

What does this mean? Vouchers disproportionately go to students that do not have special needs. These general education students then attend schools that have a significantly lower rate of students with special needs than do their traditional public school contemporaries. The transfer

of students as directed by their families is a God-given right. The transfer of funds, however, requires the traditional public school to do more with less. Less resources are available to educate the remaining general education and special education students. Let me restate this for emphasis. Funding students does not cost the same per student. Educating special needs students is more expensive than educating general education students. When general education students leave traditional public schools and the associate amount of that transfer is removed from the resources of the traditional public school, students with special needs are forced to do more with significantly less. This is just simply not acceptable. Our students with special needs deserve more. Our consciences should dictate that meeting the unique learning needs of students with special needs should be a priority in a public school, not a deleterious impact of the EdChoice voucher program.

We can argue about whether education should rightly be considered a product that would benefit from competition pursuant to a business model that seeks to maximize return on investment. The problem that most folks do not embrace is that, as educators, we never reject “raw material”, our students. We never turn away a student that has a need that is expensive or difficult to meet. We never close our doors to students with special needs that do not fit “minimum specifications”. We educate all children. Because of the negative impact of the EdChoice program on students with special needs, I urge the decision makers to stop transferring money from public schools to schools that are not equally committed to educating ALL students.

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

References:

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