

Laura Jones, 1790 Old Tannery Circle, Hudson, OH

Chairman Jones, Senator Roegner and all of the members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the chance to come in and express my views on Ohio's EdChoice Voucher System. Let me begin by telling you that I am a resident of Senator Roegner's district and have the greatest respect for all the hard work she does for Hudson as well as the State of Ohio. I am equally impressed with her daughters and their work with Hudson High School's chapter of Drug Free Clubs of America, the largest chapter in the nation with more than 800 members at Hudson High School.

I want to give you some quick background about me and why I feel I am qualified to testify on the EdChoice Voucher issue. First of all, I am the chair of the Hudson City School District's Financial Advisory Committee to our school treasurer and the chair to the Citizen's Committee that works to pass local school levies. This makes me a parent that understands school funding more than most. In fact, my daughter and I came down five years ago to testify about the changes made to Tangible Personal Property taxes. Secondly, I work for a local university supervising student teachers. This means I travel Northeast Ohio visiting affluent suburban schools, inner-city public schools, charter schools, Catholic schools, wealthy private schools and middle class suburban schools. I get to be a fly on the wall in all of these schools, sitting quietly in the back of the classroom and I can tell you that these schools are not failing. I also work with inner-city students in the Akron schools with my church and see meaningful change being made through targeted programs. Finally, I am the Ohio Middle Level Association's Parent of the Year for this past year. While literally being Mom of the Year doesn't win me many points at home, I hope it proves to you that I am a parent who is highly invested in public schools.

The current system is broken, which, as you know, is why the entire state is in an uproar about EdChoice. A major change that is needed is the funding mechanism of how that money is distributed, sending the money to the private, parochial or charter school from a separate fund instead of taking money from the local public school. Why does this matter? Because nearly every public school is not receiving the full amount per pupil from the state, however, they then have the full amount of \$6000/pupil taken from them for the voucher. This essentially means that local tax dollars voted on by the citizens to support their school are being sent to cover the difference in the voucher. One of the most extreme examples of this occurs in the district next to mine, Woodridge. They receive \$957/pupil from the state, but then must send more than 6 times that amount for each voucher student. This has been happening for years and makes no sense.

Another reason the current system is broken is because of how each school is evaluated. I was a public school teacher before my children were born and this was an issue then. Despite multiple "fixes", it is still broken. A great example of this is in a district about 20 minutes north of mine, Solon. Although they scored higher on the state score card than my own district of Hudson, they have a school that is considered failing. Why? Because of the At-Risk K-3 Reading Measure, despite the fact that Solon has some of the highest overall reading scores in the State of Ohio. I think we can all agree that Solon is not a failing school. Currently Hudson does not have any failing schools, but that could easily change with

such a broken evaluation system. And, like I said, the state has been trying to fix that for the 20 years that I've been paying attention, and I'm sure longer than that.

To add insult to injury, the schools receiving the EdChoice vouchers do not have to play by the same rules. They do not have to service special needs students, provide transportation to students or take the same state test to show their successes or failures. They do not have to prove themselves to local voters to pass a tax levy. Hudson has been able to prove itself to tax payers through transparency, fiscal responsibility and high performing students. Shouldn't parochial and private schools receiving tax monies have to do the same? As the chair to our local Citizens' Committee that promotes our local levies and bond issues, I know how difficult it is to pass a school levy. Hudson citizens have been supportive of our districts' levies, but, as I said, that is because of the trust built between the school and the community.

Finally, I mentioned that I visit many schools both for my job and while volunteering for my church. I visit schools from every economic background and what I see time and again are hard working teachers doing their best for the students in their classrooms. Pulling money away from the schools with the poorest students is only going to perpetuate the problem, especially for the students who are not receiving vouchers to attend another school. It also pulls down the home values for the families in these districts, exaggerating the wealth gap between the haves and the have nots. And, again, this is based on a flawed test.

Please know that there are great teachers all across Ohio working hard. There are students and families that are counting on you to fix this problem. Local districts evaluated by a flawed system should not pay the price through losing dollars to private and parochial schools that do not have to play by the same rules. I urge you to set up a separate fund for EdChoice Vouchers instead of continuing to take that money from local public schools. I also ask that you hold all schools receiving tax dollars to the same standards. Ohio's public schools are worth it. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my thoughts on this.