

Good Morning. Thank you for hearing my testimony. As an introduction, my name is Lukas Bickel. I stand before you as a conscientious citizen, a principal of a non-public school with 110 students on scholarship, and a head of a household who has exercised choice when it comes to his children's education.

Does your mind quickly go to politics when you hear the words voucher, school choice, or state scholarship? I'm hard pressed to see the issue of granting families a choice in education a partisan issue. Is not freedom a core value on both sides of the aisle? Are we not all in agreement about one's right to the pursuit of happiness? Do we not agree that a parent knows their child best?

Parents, as citizens and consumers, have demands that need to be represented in the educational marketplace. With the increased polarization of ideas in our country, parents long for educational options that align with their values and preferences. With increased segregation within school districts, minorities and the impoverished desire an option outside of the one assigned to the home they could afford to purchase or rent. With monopolies proving to give customers an inferior product, the market of education demands competition as a way of iron sharpening iron.

As a principal of a building with over 75% of its student body on scholarship, I beg you not to put these students in jeopardy. There is a seemingly endless array of student success stories but I would like to share what may not be as readily apparent; scholarships help the whole family and in turn, the community. School officials and fellow school families become a support network that encourages the entire family to succeed. We serve as job references, we launch fundraisers in the face of trials, we provide classes on parenting, financial responsibility, and grief, we function as surrogate parents at daddy/daughter dances, we give unlimited access to our food pantry, and we offer a constant in the midst of life's uncertainties. Not that this does not happen in our public buildings, but are we not stronger together? Why exclude the non-public school from the village required to raise a child?

If these concepts resonate with you, I ask that you protect the much needed expansion that was announced in November. It will only stand to improve the already successful EdChoice scholarship programs in this great state of Ohio. Thank you for advocating for families by granting their children equal opportunity in education.

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