

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Pat Czech, a retired sixth grade public school teacher. My career as an educator began when I volunteered in my children's classrooms. I enjoyed working with students so much that I commuted to Cleveland State for three years and earned my teaching credentials. Upon retirement from teaching I was elected to the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake City Schools Board of Education. I currently serve as the President of our Board. I take my obligations to the voters and children of our communities very serious to the point of being a 24/7 educator.

Teaching Sixth grade, at the former Sheffield Middle School, was the most worthwhile profession I have had. I enjoyed sharing my love of learning while preparing the eleven and twelve year olds for a fulfilling life. I also prepared them for Ohio's high stakes tests, even though the tests changed continuously and meaningful results were rarely forthcoming. As ridiculous as it seems these high stakes tests are not even aligned to childhood development. It broke my heart to see students with test anxiety or learning disabilities traumatized by hours of testing.

I know there is distrust from some legislators that schools don't do everything possible to help our students. While I assume that may be true somewhere in the State, I haven't encountered it personally. What I have encountered is how children living in poverty struggle in school. The notion that schools continue to be a component of politics is disturbing to me. I feel the EdChoice Program has been the end game all along for those who wish to privatize the education system in Ohio.

Taking public funds and giving them to private institutions, based on tests and a rating system that clearly sets out to inaccurately "prove" and not to help us "improve" is a waste of public tax dollars.

Simply, our district's local taxpayers have decided to vote a certain amount of millage/dollars for our school district to operate. When a levy goes on the ballot, we literally tour our district's neighborhoods, along with local organizations. The time that we invest in being transparent with where taxpayer money goes is exorbitant, but necessary. The reason our levies pass, is because we continuously provide a model of honesty and share finances with our community members. We are entrusted to spend our money wisely. The taxpayers are paying it to us specifically based on the needs that we have. These property tax dollars are ear marked for our district's public schools and that is why we ask for a specific millage.

There is not a doubt in my mind that our community members are all in financially with our district. We have tapped them out so to speak, to make up for the reduction of state funding and the increase in state mandated program expenses. Our five year forecast lies in the balance of every single dollar we operate on. There is no room for deviation and I would say that is the norm of schools across the State. **If we have to fund EdChoice through our current local budget, it will financially destroy us. Let me repeat that... it will financially destroy our school district. We hang in the balance every day.**

Because the state has reduced our funding we have had to cut staff, programs, and are operating at a level where we are financially responsible, but we have no frills. We cannot cut any further. Even with these reductions we have managed to creatively fund fine arts, sports, wrap-around services, and student transportation. Our staff members excel at keeping our award winning programs such as our Academic Challenge teams, Robotics teams and a 5-star pre-school in place.

This is where the equity portion comes in. When we are barely getting by because the state only sends us roughly \$2,200.00 per pupil per year, why should a EdChoice pupil get to take roughly six-thousand dollars from us for a private school that is already working with a better budget. Legislators should be fixing the issue by funding our schools instead of taking more money from our districts and our tax payers.

I am a local tax payer and I live in our district. The levies I voted for are intended to go to our district and our district alone. I did not vote for my money to be taken from our school and given to some other school not even in our community. EdChoice Vouchers as proposed should be considered illegal. It is stealing from our local taxpayers. What gives legislators the right to take local money and give it to religious schools or private for profit schools? Ethically, this is not right.

Is the expectation that we speak poorly about the state legislators to get our community to stand up to this now? Why would legislators want that?

I ask you to please be the legislators who realistically care to educate children to the best of their abilities. Do not fund EdChoice on the backs of public schools. Do not give our tax dollars to private for profit "ventures" that don't have to follow the same rules you have imposed on public schools.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide input regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am happy to address your questions.