

Members of this committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I am here today to speak in support of the voucher reforms passed by the Ohio House. I am a parent, taxpayer, and the President of the Athens City School Board. Despite being named "Athens City School District", our district includes the villages of The Plains, Millfield, and Chauncy. Without the proposed changes found in Senate Bill 89, the voucher system will disproportionately impact economically challenged regions, which includes the Athens City School district and other districts in our county.

It is my hope that if the state is committed to including vouchers as part of our education system that we will not use "failing schools" as claimed by a state testing system to apply for vouchers and move towards one that is based on income, as is currently proposed.

It is widely accepted that the state testing system is flawed. Since that is the case, why would we base a voucher system on school "grades" as assigned by such a fundamentally flawed system?

According to the recent state testing based report card, 3 of the 6 schools in our district are considered to be failing - one elementary school, our middle school, and high school. As a district we are working to reach every child, and one of the greatest barriers to increased success is funding. With a voucher system based upon a school being labeled as "failing" through state testing, it will allow for the taking of many thousands of tax dollars from public schools to private ones, at the detriment of nearly 1.7 million public school children.

Our Board of Education recently passed a resolution opposing the voucher system as it was written, a copy of which I have provided you with today. Based upon suspect conclusions of a school's performance, students who have never attended our schools and subsequently never brought with them state funding, could apply for a voucher. It would then require our district to pay the amount of the vouchers for those who wish to attend private or parochial schools - schools by the way which are not held to the same assessment standards and other laws as our public schools. This is not a shifting of funds that these students brought to our schools from the state to a private school, but rather a requirement of new funds to be paid for out of the district budget. If enacted without amendment, over the next 4 or 5 years our district's budget could be devastated by further depleting already stretched resources in an economically challenged area.

If these amendments are not made, districts who have or will have private schools stand to lose hundreds of thousands of local, public school dollars. The voucher program would diminish work towards a system of common schools as these vouchers at the expense of our public schools and our students.

Ohio state testing data demonstrates that as median household income decreases, so does the supposed “grade” for each district. This is not because income determines intelligence, ability, or aptitude. Better funded schools provide opportunities that less affluent ones can not. Reaching our most underserved and vulnerable students requires investment - not divestment. Putting increased pressure on districts that already struggle will further challenge them to provide the type of learning opportunities that our children need.

A well supported public school system is one that has a foundation built upon excellent teachers, sound policy, and adequate financial support. We can do much better with our public schools and diverting money from them only worsens an already dire situation.

Again I am grateful for the opportunity to speak here today and I thank you for your time.

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