Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

I am a school counselor in a public school and I am the product of an Ohio Catholic school education. My job is to help students with their personal, social, academic, and post-secondary skills. I help students to be the best versions of themselves, while helping them to problem-solve ways that they can deal with non-academic barriers, and I help them to understand both the power they have to deal with problems on their own as well as finding ways to deal with problems that they cannot deal with individually. I help them to understand that there is significant power that exists with getting together with people who have similar difficulties. I help adults with that, too.

This is my 5th year as a school counselor. This school year I have already created and delivered programming on managing anger, using coping skills, understanding differences, dealing with stress and anxiety, utilizing restorative practices, and understanding career pathways, among other topics. Understand that I have purposefully integrated topics for elementary, middle school, and adult trainings in the above list because we can all benefit from learning more from all of the above--these are not things that we learn once and never again. However, the middle school students that I work with seem to do the best at integrating the above information, sometimes better than adults that we elect at public offices.

I am here today because, despite the fact that I love what I do, I do feel that I am burning out of my profession, and it has to do with the loss of staff that I see each year since I have been employed. I have a wonderful group of students, parents, and staff that I work with, but I never feel that I can do enough or be enough for them. This is personal for me, because I care greatly about the people that I serve. This year, for the first time, I am split between two buildings. I am at an elementary school two days/week and at a middle school three days/week. In total, my schools combined serve over 1,100 students, and for the elementary students I am their only school counselor. The middle school students that I serve have a 5-day/week school counselor as well, and we are still overwhelmed with their level of need. In addition to teaching lessons on social-emotional skills, I am responsible for being responsive to students who have urgent needs at home, completing counseling agency referrals, and providing college and career advising to all students, etc. I am additionally given the task of initiating 504 evaluations and Intervention Assistance Team meetings, which are beyond my scope of practice as a school counselor. It is an impossible job, made even more impossible by the fact that, even when I was 5 days/week at a building with fewer students, I would never get to know each student well enough to be able to provide every student with a comprehensive view of what their college and career options are, and to work with them on every skill that they would need in a school setting. And then, I am expected to market myself with data in order to advocate for my job and my profession!

Every school counselor that I have met is a professional in the highest standing who cares deeply about the work that we do, and the students that we serve. To make any assertion that public schools do not serve every student to the extent that we are able is a disrespect to the school counseling profession and displays an ignorance toward the very nature of the work that we do, and how much we are tasked with due to the lack of staff and other vital resources in public schools. We do our best to serve all, but all
cannot be served with the inequitable funding that the state of Ohio provides. To take more away from public schools continues the irresponsible behavior that the state of Ohio has been known for ever since the first DeRolph ruling in 1997, when I was in elementary school myself, that ruled our state’s funding of education to be unconstitutional. Our state’s funding of public education has been ruled unconstitutional three more times since then, with zero accountability from the legislative body. How about, instead of trying to find new ways to skirt the unconstitutional way that their public schools are treated, that we instead put the funding where it is needed most, back into the schools that are struggling, and towards the classrooms that need the most resources, instead of punishing us with less? School counselors are just one resource that teachers need to teach effectively. I have worked with so many rockstar teachers that are doing amazing work and creating phenomenal growth with their students despite the cards that they are dealt from the state legislature every day. Come spend a day with me if you don’t agree, and I guarantee you will be amazed by what you see from our amazing public school teachers, school counselors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school nurses, aides, secretaries, music teachers, interpreters, instructional assistants, school psychologists, safety specialists, food service specialists, administrators, social workers, librarians, intervention specialists, custodians, attendance & data specialists, coaches, mentors, and others who walk through our doors every single day. Each and every one of them is so valuable to the education of our children, and why this is not better understood is a mystery to me. To say that we need to fund alternatives to public schools because they are failing is like telling a parent that they should give up custody of their child because their child has a medical condition - the situation deserves more resources and care, not more punishment. A ‘stick’ does not scare away situations that require systemic changes. I went to a Catholic K-8 and high school, and I appreciate the good experiences that some private schools provide. This is not an excuse to rob our public schools of appropriate funding via EdChoice. This is especially egregious when private schools are not required to meet the standards that all public schools provide on a regular basis.

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