

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today about the Ed Choice voucher system.

My name is Steven Yeager and I teach College and Career Readiness at Heath High School. In that role, I help my students make a plan for after graduation, whether that takes the form of an apprenticeship, enrolling in higher education, enlisting in the military, or any number of other avenues. I do this because I want all my students to be successful---whatever success means to them.

I will admit that I don't have a deep or intricate knowledge of the voucher program or the proposed changes, but I can speak to the difficulties of working in a public school system that is in need of adequate funding.

Despite the recent budgetary increase for school wraparound services, which has been very helpful, our guidance staff is still stretched thin. The needs of nearly five hundred students are spread between one guidance counselor, one part time social worker which is shared between several other buildings, and myself, whose primary focus is teaching and working with seniors.

While the building I work in is not eligible for Ed Choice vouchers, two buildings in my district are---despite having 100% of students meet the third grade reading guarantee. Those same buildings have pressing facility maintenance needs such as leaky roofs and HVAC issues for which we will be running a permanent improvement levy next month.

Every year I have at least five out of my hundred or so students who tell me they plan to become teachers. I encourage them, but I make sure they understand that it's a historically difficult time to work in education in the state of Ohio. I explain how challenging it is to provide for yourself as an educator working outside of the public school system, and I draw their attention to laws like the voucher system and the unconstitutional school funding model. I wish I didn't feel obligated to give them this warning, and that I could recommend my profession without reservation, but the uncertainty is just too great.

I fear that tax dollars spent on vouchers, whether directly or indirectly, will reduce the opportunity and attention given to the 90% of students in Ohio's public schools. I urge you to act on this critically important issue and invest in the success of Ohio and its workforce by investing in the public education system and minimizing the use of school vouchers.

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