

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am a teacher at Licking Heights High School in Pataskala, Ohio. I am the daughter of a teacher and remember distinctly growing up in Norwalk, Ohio my mom attending levy meetings, helping her distribute yard signs, and feeling the disappointment when levies failed, teachers were laid off, and new buildings were not built. I graduated from a high school built in 1919, torn down after the new building was finally built 5 years after I graduated. I have been a teacher myself for 19 years and came into this profession fully aware of the difficulties in funding our public schools. I have knocked on hundreds of doors, made hundreds of phone calls, recruited dozens of volunteers, served hot dogs at levy tailgates, spent hours in strategy meetings, and sat up late watching election returns often just to be disappointed again and again in 3 different school districts in Ohio. I regularly attend board meetings to watch our Board of Education justify every dollar and cent it spends for our students. As a taxpayer and parent I am glad to see the accountability, but saddened at the difficulty of getting the supplies and human resources we need to give our students - and my children - what they deserve. Our district is one that is severely limited by the funding cap currently in place, and the loss of additional funds through the EdChoice voucher program would cripple our ability to serve the students who choose our public schools. The additional insult of losing a portion of our taxpayer money - the money that we begged for, promised to be good stewards of, and account for daily - to private schools with little to no accountability is an affront to those very taxpayers. While canvassing in our community I heard skeptical residents say they heard unrealistic and false rumors that the school just pockets levy money and never uses it. I heard people realistically concerned that their property taxes would make it impossible for them to buy groceries next month. I heard people express concerns about traffic, sports, diversity, and rigor. All of these residents wanted assurances that their money was needed, would be used responsibly, and was worth their investment in our community's future. Vouchers undermine that trust they have in our public schools, our local governments, and ultimately our democracy.

In my classroom I spend a lot of time making data based decisions. Without the ability to compare these private schools, because of their lack of a report card at all - there is no way to know if these students are faring better there than in our transparent and accountable public schools. And the report card that public schools (but again, not private) are evaluated with doesn't even provide a clear path to achievement for Ohio's public school students due to mysterious formulas, moving targets, and unattainable goals. We need to fix the broken report card system before allowing these voucher decisions to be made, and then we need to be sure that taxpayer money is not being used in private schools with no accountability. If families want to choose the best education for their child that is their right, but families who choose public schools - and all the opportunities they provide - should not be penalized.

Of the plans that have been proposed thus far I prefer SB 89 as passed by the House because it does the better job of working towards these goals.

Thank you,
Gina DA