

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. My name is Amy Raubenolt and I am a parent in Westerville City Schools. I am also, at least in part, a product of a parochial school education. I attended St. Mary's Elementary and Junior High School in Urbana Ohio through 8th grade, and it was a great experience for me. When my oldest daughter was in preschool, we looked at local private, parochial and public schools to choose the best environment for her and for her younger twin sisters. We ultimately chose to enroll them in Westerville Schools, because it was the best fit for them. So I'm not against parochial schools or private schools and I'm not against the idea of parents and students choosing the school community that is best for them.

What I oppose is carving money out of public school budgets to support that decision. Public schools are funded by the tax dollars of all citizens. They are THE public schools. Parochial schools are not schools for the public-nor, obviously, are private schools. Public schools are for all students. That is the intent behind supporting a public school system. Taxes support public schools. And in return, public school students must pass state tests, maintain transparency in their funding decisions, and schools must hire licensed teachers. With the voucher system, parochial and private schools would strip funds from public schools without accountability to those same standards.

Our public schools in Ohio are already making tough choices to ensure fiscal stewardship, accountability and transparency with every dollar from that budget. And they are serving all students. Everyone is welcome. Westerville City School's motto is: Where you belong, because it takes in all students and gives everything it has to educate those students. This message is powerful. Everyone is welcome and everyone belongs. But it also speaks to the challenge of public education. Everyone takes those tests, everyone is a part of that performance metric. So students who are struggling with food scarcity, homelessness, and challenging home environments are all part of public school system's outcomes. Our public schools take in all students, welcomes them, support them and helps them learn. That is a powerful act that is not measured on a report card index.

There is a wild audacity in using admittedly flawed report card metrics to determine if a school system must forfeit some of its funding to a school model that isn't required to be judged by those standards at all.

I served on the committee in the fall 2019 to pass our school levy and our community asked tough questions about every dollar spent, every school board decision, and every bit of performance before Election Day. The community demanded rigor from our school district before it would pass that levy. We were asking for funds to repair some of our older buildings, build 2 new buildings to support growth, and maintain existing expenditures in line with inflation. **But that ask was subject to rigor.** And it made passing that levy tough. We hosted questions and answer sessions, put out FAQs on social media, we fought back on misunderstandings about boundaries, funding, and accountability. But we succeeded. We passed that levy in November because we were able to demonstrate to our community that our public schools NEED this money and that they are being good fiscal stewards of existing funds. Our community passed that school levy because they believe in what Westerville City Schools is accomplishing and has plans to do in the future. Our schools succeed when we fund them.

But the voucher system would carve that money away. The financial projections we provided our community would be reduced by \$1.2 million. The promises we made about how those tax dollars would be spend, a waste of breath. Because we would, once again, not have the funds we need. The

entire narrative we provided about what that levy would support, would be altered. **Why would our community believe us next time?**

I lead the marketing efforts for our levy campaign and I was excited and proud of the future we were building in Westerville Schools. Stable funding. New buildings to support growth in our community. Repaired historic school buildings and a secure budget. Our community voted on the purpose of that money and the voucher expansion threats to slice those funds away from their voted intent. Parochial and private school advocates did not battle to secure that school funding with us in October and November. That's not what our community voted on in November. To carve that money away now is wrong.

My three daughters are in high school now in Westerville Schools and they are thriving. My oldest was accepted to The Ohio State University and will start school there in the fall. She loved being a part of the theatre community in her school and she excelled in all of her science classes. In middle school, her teachers identified the need for an IEP and helped get her the support she needed. And she is planning to study zoology and genetics. Her sisters are sophomores and are doing equally well.

Abigail enjoys the business club and helps run the school store. She wants to study accounting but she also has a passion for chemistry and a real bond with her chemistry teachers. Ella leads the SciFi Club and excels at math. She talks about being a teacher. We start looking at colleges next year and I've been thrilled with how well Westerville Schools has prepared them.

Don't let anyone tell you our schools are failing in Westerville. I'm in those schools every week and great things happening there, the teachers are implementing innovative ideas in the classroom, students are taking initiative on their own projects, staff work hard all day to keep students safe and make them welcome, and school administrators are leading with strong positive culture. When I say that I'm a proud parent in Westerville City Schools, I'm proud not just of my daughters and their success, but of the schools in my community and the work they do every day for students.

I urge you to protect the public schools' budget from this latest assault. Public schools are already making do with caps and mandates and cuts, perpetually changing performance measures, and a solidly unconstitutional funding model. And in the community, we are making up the difference by passing levies. But the pockets of public schools and the communities that support them, are not deep. We have just what we need. So do the right thing here and keep parochial and private vouchers OUT of our budget. If the STATE decides to fund vouchers out of state money, I also urge you to hold those schools accountable to the same performance metrics and accountability standards.

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.