

House Bill 9 Testimony-Cincinnati Hebrew Day School

BEN TRAVIS

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 Ben Travis and I am the Finance Director at the Cincinnati Hebrew Day School (CHDS) located in Golf Manor, Ohio. I have been a resident of Ohio for the last twenty-one and a half years. I am joined here today by a group of very concerned parents, most of whom have a child going into Kindergarten next year. As the individual overseeing finances at the school I am particularly grateful to the State of Ohio for the creation and development of the Edchoice Voucher Program, for I have seen firsthand how it has made an incredibly profound difference in the lives of our community members.

To tell you a little about CHDS, we are the oldest Jewish Day School in Cincinnati, currently in the midst of our 74th year. We have seen four generations of students at the school, with the great grandson of a member of the school's first graduating class currently a student in kindergarten. Though as mentioned most of our students are local, the school draws students from five zip codes around the Cincinnati area and has seen a growth in its student population of 70% over the last 10 years. We offer a dual curriculum to our students, with Judaic and General studies. We are a community school and accept students without regard to academic ability.

The school regularly monitors its academic progress both in regard to where students are currently versus where they have been, as well as where our students are in relation to their peers in other schools. CHDS conducts the AIR tests that all public schools take and we consistently exceed state averages. Nevertheless, as one of our teachers will soon share with you, demanding parents with other educational options are our greatest quality control mechanism. CHDS at any time can be given a thumbs down by our constituents simply by a parent pulling their child out of our school and sending him or her to one of the other Schools in our area. This is why we have instituted school wide testing three times a year using Aimsweb standardized tests to ensure quality of instruction. To give a quick example of the school's recent academic performance, winter testing revealed an increase of 7 points in our student's national percentile rank versus fall scores in math. This reflects a rate of improvement that has elevated our regular ed. program to the top 20% nation-wide.

In addition to academics, CHDS collaborates with parents to instill values of kindness, respect and ethical behavior in each child. The school gives children the tools not only to do well in school today, but also to help make the right decisions in the future. School graduates are admitted to the finest high schools, and are well prepared to meet any academic challenge. Since the school's humble beginnings in 1946 many of the school's charges have gone on to become distinguished rabbis, educators, attorneys, doctors, medical researchers, corporate executives, and more.

Parents in our school are hardworking but bring home modest incomes-more than half of our school families have been assessed as low income. Currently only 10% of our families can pay the full remainder of tuition even after receiving an Edchoice voucher. Though as we mentioned earlier our

school has seen explosive growth over the last ten years, our still relatively small class sizes make our cost per student significant. Due to state law, for low-income families, we must accept the voucher as tuition paid in full. That means we need to raise scholarship dollars from private philanthropy for every child, in some cases as much as \$8000 per child. With, as mentioned earlier, the majority of our students considered low income, balancing our budget is an overwhelming task.

In 2007, when the voucher program was first introduced into our school, our local public school met one of 14 state quality indicators; currently it meets 0 out of 11 indicators that measure the percent of students who have passed state tests. CHDS therefore serves as an anchor for our community by giving a local option to families who might otherwise move out of the neighborhood in search of better education for their children.

On a personal level, I can tell you that I appreciate the importance of public education. I myself am a product of 13 years of the New York City public schools. My recollections of the words shared at my high school orientation by the principal of the public magnet school I attended in Manhattan still stick with me. "Approximately 30,000 of your peers took the test to get in here and only about 300 of you are sitting in this room today. If you want to stay here you'd better work!"-and work we did, to such an extent that I have to admit that my public school years in some ways were more rigorous than my subsequent educational experience at the Ivy League University I attended afterwards. Just as my parents encouraged me to attend the school that they felt would give me the greatest chance for success, I believe all parents should be given that choice for their children be it in the public or private sector. In that vein, I believe that supporting the EdChoice program is a wise investment for Ohio.

Please make this investment in the future of our state's children. Edchoice vouchers have proven to be both less expensive for the state and more effective in producing well educated students who are, as we will shortly see, not only "proficient" but who can excel and become the leaders of the next generation. Your support means so much to all of us.

RABBI YECHIEL GABAY

My name is Rabbi Yechiel Gabay and I have been a resident of Ohio for 12 years, with over a decade of experience as both a teacher and parent at Cincinnati Hebrew Day School. I would like to share my perspective on the education my children and my students receive at the school with you as well as share some thoughts about my co-teacher in the general studies department, Mrs. Nicola Steely, who I believe to be one of Ohio's great teachers.

Although my professional focus is in the field of Judaic Studies, I have also taught Math and Social Studies over the course of my years with the school. Under the direction of the school administration, I used the State and Common Core standards to guide every class, ensuring students received targeted instruction. For instance, my 5th grade math students completed the year with a firm grasp of decimals, manipulation of proper, improper fractions, and geometry, as evidenced by higher than average scores on their Aimsweb and state test scores.

As a 4th grade Judaic studies teacher for much of my time, I am constantly able to utilize the thorough grounding students are receiving in Language Arts classes to further their understanding of other texts. Students regularly cite examples they find of metaphors, similes, idioms and hyperbole, and are able to express themselves clearly in their writing.

As a parent, two of my daughters have graduated the School with all the tools they needed for high school, while I have four other children who are still being successfully navigated through their elementary education by Cincinnati Hebrew Day School.

As I mentioned earlier, I would also like to share some thoughts about my co-teacher in 4th grade, Mrs. Nicola Steely, who has been a master educator at our school for the last 17 years. She is both deeply loved by her students, as well as trusted and admired by fellow faculty members. A key component to Mrs. Steely's unique success is the trust and belief she places in the students, which is something palpable to them. A student once wrote to her "Thank you for encouraging me and believing in me this whole year."

Together with the parents of her charges, Mrs. Steely has very high academic expectations of her students. Her success in this area is evident from her student's high levels of academic success on the Ohio State Tests. This past year 100% of Mrs. Steely's students were proficient in language arts with 74% accelerated or advanced. 95% percent of her students were proficient in math with again 74% accelerated or advanced.

Successes like these make our Edchoice funding so critical. Thank you so much for listening.

RACHEL BACHRACH

Good evening. My name is Rachel Bachrach. Thank for your time and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

My husband and I moved to Cincinnati from New York seven years ago for a job opportunity and because we wanted a different pace of life. One of the reasons we felt comfortable with our move was the knowledge that we would be able to find a neighborhood that worked for our family along with a school that worked for our children.

Thank you for your support of education in Ohio and especially your support of non-public school students and school choice. The fact that we can use EdChoice vouchers to send our son and daughter to Cincinnati Hebrew Day School has been key. We hold CHDS to a high standard when it comes to the quality of education, and we've only been impressed! We consider it a privilege that our children can receive the education that works for us.

We have two children, ages nine and seven, in elementary school, and they are thriving. My son Jonathan and my daughter Alyssa are testing above the 90th percentile in both math and language arts. They literally run out the door to school because they are excited about what they are learning each

day. CHDS's student-centered model and broad curriculum allow them both to learn at their own pace, within the structure of a standard school setting. The rigorous academic instruction keeps them on their toes, and even though they are loathe to admit it, they love school and their schoolwork.

My children apply what they are learning at school at home in such creative ways. In fact, Alyssa, who is seven, recently got a \$25 Target gift card as a reward from a neighborhood program. When I took her to Target, she kept adjusting the calculation as she picked up different products she was thinking of buying. At one point she said, rapid fire, "This pillow is \$18 and these pencils are \$5, so it's 23 because I took 2 from 5 and put that with 18. And then there's 3 left and I added that to 20." I was staring at her, shocked, and she said, "What? That's what Mrs. Madden taught us to do." I was trying to make sure I was caught up with her, and the cashier turned to me and said, "I want her to balance my checkbook!" Alyssa did those calculations so naturally, because what she is learning in second grade really became part of her thought process and she was able to apply it seamlessly to real life.

Jonathan and Alyssa have both developed great friendships, and they have strong, positive relationships with faculty and staff, who they view as role models. My husband and I appreciate the values the Cincinnati Hebrew Day School staff inculcates in our children. They are becoming more respectful, conscientious citizens, and that is something we don't take for granted. In fact, Jonathan's third-grader teacher recently told me that he's doing so well, she's introduced a new program with him to remind him to be on top of the 'extras'—pushing in his chair when he leaves the table, for example. I told her how much I appreciate that because we're working on those small, thoughtful acts at home as well, and there's great value when the messaging at home and at school mirror each other. Alyssa recently told us about a weekend program CHDS implemented where they model and discuss ways to treat each other with respect. "This week we learned to let others shine," she said. "Not to take the attention away from somebody when they're speaking, even if you have something better to say. If someone says she got a sticker, you don't have to say, 'I got two stickers!'" What a message for a child to receive in school!

Our younger son, Ethan, is set to enter kindergarten next year at Cincinnati Hebrew Day School. We have been counting on the EdChoice voucher so that we can afford him the same quality education his older siblings have. At this point in the year, we have already planned and budgeted for next year. Your delay has put all that in limbo.

My husband is an actuary at Ohio National Financial Services and recently completed his exams and became a Fellow of the Society of Actuaries. I work part-time as a deputy editor for Mishpacha Magazine, the largest Orthodox Jewish weekly magazine in the world. As a family, we struggle to pay tuition. We sacrifice so our children can receive the education that works for them, but because it is important to us, we make it a priority. My husband and I aren't big spenders: we budget carefully, we eat out very infrequently and we don't take real vacations, we live in a house that's a little too small for a family our size, and our five children—Jonathan, Alyssa, Ethan, David, and Lily—wear many many hand-me-downs. We count on the EdChoice vouchers, so we can stay in our neighborhood, stay in Ohio, and continue to send our children to a school that works for them. I am asking you to continue supporting non-public school students and school choice, so that all children receive the quality education they need. Thank you.

LORIE CHARRON

Good evening. My name is Lorie Charron. I am not a native of Ohio. I grew up in eastern Kentucky where everyone lives on a hill or in a hollow. My family lived on a hill, but I had to walk through a hollow to get to the bus stop every day. I attended public schools my entire life. I graduated at the top of a class of more than 400 students in my county high school. I attended a public university on an academic scholarship to achieve my goal of becoming an educator. The 17 best years of my life before having children of my own were spent in front of a classroom of public high school students. Looking back, I know that if I had not been granted that scholarship, a college degree would have not been attainable for me.

I am here to represent Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, because my children are enrolled there. I did not grow up Jewish. Neither did my husband. When our family moved to Ohio and we became Jewish, we knew that our children would be attending CHDS. We were thankful that the EdChoice scholarships were available, because without them, we would not have been able to afford the tuition. Our lives would be very different today. When we first toured the school, we were so impressed with the level of care placed on every nuance of the learning environment. The secular studies are rigorous and centered on the common core. My children's test scores show me that they are on par with, if not exceeding, their peers across the state. The religious studies are equally as rigorous, and we are so happy with how well they have adapted to their new life with the help of the school. We know that Cincinnati Hebrew Day School is committed to teaching, nurturing, and protecting the Orthodox Jewish children of our community.

Our children are happy every morning to go to school. They even ask to go when they aren't feeling well, and are disappointed if they have to miss a day. They come home singing and cheerful with wonderful stories of science activities, playground games, and lessons from their teachers. Each child feels as if he is important to the teachers and administrators.

Much like the scholarship that allowed me to attend and graduate from college, our family depends on the EdChoice scholarship for our children's education. My husband is a federal employee and is paid a fair salary that I am able to supplement by working from home as a small business owner. However, our salaries just cover our modest living expenses and health care costs. I am able to do volunteer work for the school to offset some of the additional tuition costs, but couldn't possibly work enough to cover it all. For our family, there is no acceptable public school option. The school that my children would be assigned to is ranked well below average. Our children's academic and spiritual growth is dependent upon the EdChoice vouchers. Thank you for your consideration.

MICKEY FISHMAN

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 Mickey Fishman, and I live in Cincinnati.

The EdChoice voucher program has been a great help for our family and a deciding factor in our decision to raise our family in Ohio. I am a father of four children of whom three are receiving Ohio EdChoice vouchers.

Professionally, I am the Head of Talent Acquisition for an Ohio based Healthcare organization. I am responsible for hiring healthcare professionals and caregivers locally. In my professional capacity, I have seen how families have chosen to stay or even move to Cincinnati to take advantage of the wide range of educational options, both public and private. These choices allow families to move to a wider range of neighborhoods.

One recent example illustrates how the Ohio EdChoice voucher helped attract top tier talent to the state. Our startup behavioral and addictions division was looking to hire an accountant last year. The position offered a competitive salary and benefits package which was industry standard. Our final candidate had the right skill set for the role and chose to relocate from out of state for the job. They looked at various homes and settled on a neighborhood with a struggling public school, but with the ability of sending their children to a private school with an EdChoice voucher. This was a deciding factor for him in accepting the job and moving his family to Ohio.

This is one of many examples where the state benefited from a program that attracts professionals to the area. The candidate later received a promotion and is now working to build addiction and behavioral centers that benefit the entire state in the important fight against opioid addictions. In fact, both he and his wife are working professionals dedicated to their growing family and to making a difference in the lives of others.

As a Human Resources professional, I am aware of income levels for different jobs in our state. Working professionals, burdened with student debt, housing costs and rising costs of living often struggle to live on their incomes. When they add private school costs, it is almost impossible to get by.

Our families are working hard to be fiscally responsible. In my volunteer time, I co-chair Financial Peace University for members of our community. This nationally syndicated course by Dave Ramsey, teaches families how to pay off debt and live responsibly. Each Sunday evening more than 50 people join us in the synagogue social hall to learn how to budget responsibly. I invite you to get to know our families and talk to them about their lifestyles.

I ask you to please consider these families' spending habits and responsible lifestyle before you vote on a bill that would have such significant impact on working Ohio families. Hard working families deserve to choose where they send their children to be educated. The EdChoice voucher has afforded this opportunity to families in this state. The EdChoice voucher costs the state of Ohio far less than the cost to educate a child in a public school and helps families afford a school that works for their children. I ask you today to please keep the Ohio EdChoice program in place.

Thank you.

AYALA WEINRIB

Good afternoon. I feel it is both a privilege and my duty to be here. Originally when I was asked to join this delegation I smiled and was going to politely decline, describing what evenings are like in my home between homework, dinner, and bedtime routines. However, my decline was stuck in my throat and I thought how could I decline and refuse the opportunity to share how crucial Edchoice vouchers are to our community and me?

I would like to start by saying Thank you for your support of my children, of our children. Your ongoing efforts and commitment to school choice, allowing every child in our glorious state of Ohio to go to the school that is best for them, does not go unnoticed. Every one of you are here not because it's a job but you're on a mission. A mission to make a difference in the life of your constituents. You may not hear about it on a daily basis, but on a daily basis you are making a difference to my family and the thousands of other families who because of you have the ability to have choices in education.

Personally, I am a mother of a large family with eight children currently enrolled in Cincinnati Hebrew Day School. My husband is Rabbi of Congregation Zichron Eliezer, which is a 100-year-old synagogue with membership of about 140 families with approximately 300 Children.

I want to share with you a conversation that just took place this past Monday. A member of our synagogue recently heard about EdChoice being called into question. They shared with me that they do not see how they will make it without the support of the vouchers. I looked at them somewhat incredulously. Both spouses have good paying jobs and I would think that as much as it's helpful, it really isn't that crucial for them. They said with all the costs associated with a growing young family they barely make it through the month. Pulling out the vouchers would be devastating to them. At that moment I realized the difference you are making to families that are not just low income. Even for the so-called middle class these vouchers may be the difference between getting through the month or not.

Unfortunately, I as well as my husband are privy day in and day out to the impact of financial strain on our families. With growing young families, we are busy and yes sometimes even a little or a lot overwhelmed managing all the needs of our children and families. Increased financial strain can literally tear at the fabric that holds the family together.

I along with my husband are currently enrolled in the Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University class just referenced by Mr. Fishman. I wasn't shocked to hear him say that The number one issue couples fight about is— money. I hear it and see it day in and day out. You have and can continue to have the ability to make a, and perhaps **the** difference in my family, the families in our synagogue and the thousand's of Ohio families that are benefiting from School Choice. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share a little window into the difference you are making.

BRACHA ZEHNWIRTH

Hello, my name is Bracha Zehnwirth. I am an occupational therapist working in Clermont County public schools. I grew up right here in Columbus and I am a proud Buckeye! Living in Columbus, I experienced

firsthand what makes Ohio such a wonderful place to live, especially in raising a family – the relaxed pace of living, friendly neighbors, affordability, safety, beautiful natural surroundings, and the focus on family. My parents moved out of Ohio when I was in high school. Now that I have my own family, I chose to move back to Ohio because I appreciate what Ohio has to offer and want to raise my family in such an environment.

We found a lovely, affordable neighborhood in Cincinnati but unfortunately, the local public school is struggling. As an occupational therapist in the public schools, I wake up every day to improve the lives of public school students. Nothing is more important to me than the welfare of every student's education and development. For my child, I feel the best option is private school. We enrolled our daughter in Cincinnati Hebrew Day School's preschool because of the school's values and high academic standards. Cincinnati Hebrew Day School instills in their students values such as kindness and respect. The children's natural love of learning is encouraged through hands-on lessons as well as student and family collaboration. The school is a place where morals, ethics, and values are not only taught, they are lived. Our daughter is thriving socially, emotionally, and academically. On several occasions, our daughter has even taught us a thing or two!

My daughter, who is our oldest, is scheduled to begin school and enter kindergarten this coming year; however, the price of tuition creates a challenge. My husband and I both work hard but we were counting on the voucher to help us afford the school of our choice. We were very concerned when we were not able to sign up for the voucher program due to potential changes to the program. The voucher is critical to our financial situation, ensuring both our financial welfare and our daughter's quality education, as is the case for many young families like ourselves.

I am so appreciative of the voucher program and I thank the legislature for empowering us parents, who know their children best, to choose the quality and type of education that is best for their children. Please support the continuation of this program that is vital in allowing Ohio's children to attend the schools of their choice.

RABBI CHAIM HEINEIMANN

My name is Rabbi Chaim Heinemann; I have a wonderful wife, Sarah, 6 children, live in the Cincinnati Public School district and act as the Associate Director of an educational institution known as the Cincinnati Community Kollel. As a Rabbi, it is unheard of to talk three or four minutes without hearing a murmur or at times a loud roar arise from the back of the room. For me, therefore, it is truly an honor and privilege to be granted the opportunity to talk and address you all in the Ohio State Legislature.

It is never fun being the last of a group, especially when my predecessors spoke so sincerely, eloquently, and with so much passion. I therefore, would like to start things off with a bang and do something completely out of the ordinary and perhaps shocking. Allow me to thank you all for your support of non-public school students and school choice. I am confident that the high majority of the emails, faxes and meetings that you deal with on behalf of all of us are not "Thank you" notes. We are extremely appreciative for the school vouchers that all of you, the state legislators have put into law and I would like to express to you our gratitude.

Besides the upside and benefit to the community at large of vouchers that you have just heard, what they facilitate is a lot bigger and far-reaching than one would think. At the risk of talking too much about myself, I am someone who sleeps just a few hours a night and spends the rest of my time giving whatever I can to my community. From educating and giving classes to the young and old, marital counseling, and looking after local teens who are out of school, the bulk of my day is involved with improving and enhancing the lives of the greater Cincinnati community. All the above, although appreciated by the recipients, does not result in serious financial compensation. The only way that I am able to send my children to a private Jewish school is due to the voucher program that makes the costs financially viable for me. If the voucher goes away, I am not sure how I will be able to continue to benefit the community to the degree to which I am able to do now.

My children are privileged to receive a high-level private education and their high grades on the state tests reflect that. The rigorous academic instruction coupled with the warm, loving environment gives each child the confidence to succeed. One of my children, Aaron, broke down crying recently when he was pulled from school an hour early for an appointment! Not the way I remember school! Just last week I got a little peek at the amazing work that takes place inside CHDS' classrooms. My fifth child, Tova, and her Pre-k class, were doing a study on clothes. I was asked to come in with my 1 yr. old, to show and contrast the difference between her stretchy and my X- large shirt. It was humbling when one child asked innocently "R' Heinemann, how many family members fit in that shirt"? Just for the record, my doctor recently told me "R' Heinemann, you are a perfect weight, just 11 feet too short!" On a more serious note, why should my Tova who starts kindergarten in the fall miss the terrific education that all her older siblings are receiving? My oldest, who is a star student, is graduating 8th grade. Although his friends are looking at high schools across the country, he is inclined to find a private high school in the state and continue taking advantage of the Ed Choice vouchers.

It is clear to me, that there is real benefit to families and students due to the voucher program. Whether it is because students tend to do better in a school that they are excited to attend or that school choice creates a competition that improves all options, it would be a real shame if this program downsized or began to limit eligibility. Please, please support expanding school choice, so that more students can attend the school of their choice, whether public or private. This way, we in Ohio, can continue producing top-notch students for years to come, as we are known to do.

Thank you for your time and Thank you for listening.