

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. I am David Fazakas, music teacher and band director at Northern Local Schools in Perry County, where I have been teaching for the past 14 years. The reason for my testimony today is due to my concern for the future funding of my school district, particularly under the Senate's version of HB9. First, I'd like to say I'm very proud of the rural district in which I teach. The community is incredibly supportive of the schools. There is very little teacher turnover. The administration is fiscally responsible, not having had to ask for a levy since building new schools almost 20 years ago. But as great as the community, the teachers, the administration, and I think our district is, the flawed, ever-changing testing mandates and results make it appear as though our district is barely adequate, with my high school in particular getting a "D" on the state report card. Under the Senate's bill, taxpayer money would be pulled from the "under-performing" schools and districts to pay for vouchers to enable students to attend private schools out-of-district. Any deduction of funding to school districts, based on the state's flawed testing, would leave students with many less educational opportunities, due to the districts' need to cut programs in order to meet a lower annual budget. I'd like to outline some things I feel are vital for the holistic education of students, which likely would be in jeopardy should the Senate bill pass.

As a music teacher, I have the privilege and fortune of teaching students who *elect* to take my courses, such as Advanced Placement music theory, band, and guitar. Everyday, I watch students come into my classroom with a smile on their face because they get to do something they often enjoy more than their other core classes. They get the opportunity to learn and create music, which, especially for the students in my district, is often not a possibility outside of school, whether due to home and financial situations or the distance to a more developed area that could provide those same opportunities. I see this with students in other elective subjects, too, such as the visual arts and the vocational-agriculture program. I've heard it many times from students, how glad they are to have these other classes not only to break up their school day with classes that are more interesting and relevant to them, but also to open their eyes to other skills, careers, and opportunities outside of the classroom that these other electives provide. Since I'm a music teacher, I always pay attention to teacher layoffs occurring around me, because oftentimes I see these aforementioned electives as the first positions that are cut when district finances get desperate, leading to far fewer learning opportunities for our students. After teaching for the past 14 years, I would be absolutely devastated to lose any programs from our district, due to a decrease of funding from HB9, because I've seen firsthand how valued they are by the students that take these elective courses.

As a music educator who truly believes in the benefits of music education, I pay attention to studies that come out in my subject. In 2016, Harvard University published a study on instrumental music education, like band, that showed that both students and adults who played an instrument had higher executive function skills than those who didn't play an instrument. These executive functions included a more proficient working memory and faster processing speeds. In addition, they had more activation of the frontal regions of the brain, associated with executive function. As a parent, teacher, administrator, or legislator, I can't imagine why you wouldn't want every student to have those advantages not only in school, but beyond. If

something such as music, not to mention the benefits of the other elective courses, benefits the ability of our students to succeed even more in their core courses, why would you risk their elimination due to taking away funding from the schools that provide that? We don't want the students to perform worse in their core classes and on their testing, do we?

Directing the marching band at my high school is my favorite thing to do. I get to work with about 70-80 students who put countless hours in each week learning new halftime shows and perfecting their craft. Beyond the musical and educational benefits of playing an instrument, however, there are many other advantages that marching band, along with other extracurriculars like sports, provide for students. These goal-oriented group activities develop key qualities in an individual that can follow them their entire lives. Characteristics such as leadership, teamwork, self-confidence, discipline, time management, and physical fitness are all vital life skills that are difficult or impossible to teach in a normal classroom subject. Our district is fortunate that many of these activities come to our students at little or no cost to their families, enabling a wide range of students to participate in whatever extracurricular they'd like, and often more than one. Now, I've also seen what happens when districts have to resort to pay-to-play extracurriculars, due to an inadequate budget to support them. Participation drops drastically, especially in lower-income districts. I watched a marching band in our athletic league drop from 60 participants to around 20 over the course of a few years when they became pay-to-play. Their sports teams also took a big hit. I believe the Senate's version of HB9 would take enough funding from many school districts that you would see a much higher rate of pay-to-play programs, and a resulting lack of participation in extracurriculars. I don't think this benefits our students, especially when you consider all the positive, life-changing attributes these extracurriculars provide. We want to shape our students to become the leaders of tomorrow, and even though the virtues of extracurriculars might not show up in state testing, they are important in producing a more capable and well-rounded person out in the real world.

HB9 would provide the chance for students in my district to choose from the two private high schools that our district primarily feeds into, both out-of-district. Neither of these high schools provide nearly the number of opportunities that my school does, whether it is the fine arts or vocational-agriculture. I am sure they provide a decent education to their students in the limited areas in which they educate, but their students are at a disadvantage when it comes to educating them in the skills and career options in these elective subjects.

When I went to look up each of those private schools' state report cards, alas, they are nowhere to be found. Is that because, since they don't receive state funding, they don't have to follow all the public schools' testing and reporting mandates, and thus are not held to the same standards at public schools? Shouldn't these same private schools, when receiving this extra public taxpayer money through vouchers, be held to the same standards? How are parents, who are looking to get out of their public school, able to make an informed choice as to education alternatives, when they can't make an apples-to-apples comparison between private and public schools? And that's assuming the state report cards accurately show the effectiveness of schools, which many of us would argue they do not. All these questions need to be asked and seriously considered by the committee before implementing the voucher system, especially one based on school performance.

In conclusion, I believe either version of HB9 will hurt public school funding to some extent, although I believe the Senate version has the ability to cause even more damage. I

doubt our community will be happy about their hard-earned tax dollars supporting private schools out-of-district, which might lead to difficulty for us passing future levies. More importantly, less money coming into the district has to lead to less money going to the students' education. Administrators will have to decide where to make cuts, and I don't foresee very many districts being able to maintain their current course offerings, electives, and extracurriculars with a decrease in funding. If this whole voucher system is ultimately supposed to benefit the students, why jeopardize the good things that are already occurring in most school districts? Fix the ever-changing testing and reporting system, hold the private schools to the same standards, and then see where public schools' effectiveness really is. My students are hard-working and dedicated to me, the program, and the school. They deserve more, not less.

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.

Most sincerely,

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