

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 Elizabeth Washburn. I am here today not only as a very concerned voter and taxpayer in the great state of Ohio. I am also here tonight as the proud mother of two beautiful middle school girls who attend Westerville City Schools, here in central Ohio. Because of the current legislation approved last summer, Westerville went from 1 school being designated as "underperforming" to 14 of our 24 school buildings being designated as "underperforming".

As a mother of children in this district it is incomprehensible that 14 of our 24 buildings are considered by anyone as failing. This is the school district that tested for and recognized long before we did as their parents, both of my children's unique learning needs as gifted children. For years, the staff in Westerville have partnered with us to make sure my children's coursework is engaging and challenging, and they are emotionally thriving. They have provided so many opportunities they would have never had if they were not in Westerville Schools.

If you don't mind I will share a few examples. My daughters have thrived in and out of the classroom because of the dedication of the teachers, staff, and volunteers in their buildings. They would be here tonight and could share with you firsthand, except they are at rehearsals for their spring musical working hard alongside 70 other students at their school to make the best production of Music Man Jr. the audience has ever seen. This drama club is led by the music teacher, school secretary, and a parent volunteer who pour countless hours to not only challenge the students to be better thespians, but to be better people. My youngest daughter just completed her third year in an after school robotics program, led by two amazing elementary teachers, who on their own time see the importance of giving curious kids the opportunity to learn and practice job skills such as programming, research, presentations, and strategic thinking. Their team qualified for the state competition at Wright State University this winter, and my daughter says it was a highlight of her life. My oldest daughter and I recently attended her high school scheduling night for incoming freshman. When we left she talked for the next hour straight because she was so excited that she will have the opportunity to take AP classes, college credit plus classes, and also be a part of her high school's engineering track. When the teacher shared that on this track the students will have the opportunity to take 4 engineering electives where they can explore all types of engineering and have the opportunity for many hands on experiences including designing and programming a robotic arm. You see my daughter as a 7th grader scored high enough on the SAT to get into almost any university in Ohio and she dreams of one day becoming an engineer for NASA. We have NEVER felt she may not see that dream because of a lack of opportunity in her school buildings. In fact, I think she could see that dream come true because of the support and opportunities she's had in Westerville City Schools.

I am not only here today as a concerned parent. I am also here as a dedicated community member. My husband and I believe very strongly that it is better to give than to receive. My husband has been in the nonprofit sector for over 20 years devoting his time and career to caring for those in need this includes college students, human trafficking victims and those in

need of affordable housing. I am grateful to work part time, and with the remainder of my time I am able to volunteer in our schools. Over the past 8 years I have volunteered over 1000 hours in the Westerville City School District. I am well aware of the richness of diversity in our district where students come from 63 countries and speak 58 languages. I am also aware of the differences in socio economics in our district with an average of 35.7% of our students qualify as economically disadvantaged. I have sat on numerous committees with the staff in Westerville who are dedicated to making sure every student has success at school. I'm very concerned with seeing some of the proposed legislation including the income based EdChoice vouchers to include those up words of 400% federal poverty income guidelines. For a family of 4 that would be \$103,000, almost double the Ohio average median household income. The idea the state would consider funding middle to upper class families with education vouchers to attend private or charter schools with public tax dollars, while the funding formula for our public schools continues to fall short year after year and in districts like ours is capped regardless of growth is outrageous. I spent over 100 hours working hard this fall to convince tax payers in our school district to pass a levy that we thought would help ensure support of our Westerville students for several years. It is unacceptable to me that we are looking at having to go back to the ballot much sooner and put more of the burden on our local taxpayers to fund our public schools, with the fact that our district will lose millions of dollars to pay for the private education of some who have never even stepped foot in our hallways. Especially when part of the EdChoice program was designed to help give a choice to those economically disadvantaged. What about the economically disadvantaged in our buildings?

I am not only here today representing my family or myself. I am here also as President of Westerville Parent Council. We are a PTA council that represents 35 parent organizations with hundreds of volunteers that support the students of Westerville City Schools. Our council includes, PTA, PTO, and Booster organizations. For the past five years, our volunteers have donated over 400,000 hours to support student achievement in and out of the classroom. Over that same five year period, our collective efforts have raised over \$4.6 million dollars to support programs and activities that enhance the educational and extracurricular well-being of students and provided scholarships for further education to graduating seniors. We firmly believe and support parents' right to choose and decide the best education for their children. This is not a debate on public vs. private or charter education. Our united concern is seeing money taken away from public school districts because of inconsistent and flawed measurements that only public schools are held to. We urge you that any school that receives any public tax dollars should be held to all the same standards and accountability as their public school counterparts. We also urge you to consider fixing the flawed ways of measuring a school's success. In Westerville we have several elementary schools on the underperforming list for next year due to the improving at risk K-3 literacy measurement, yet these buildings passed at or just slightly under 100% of their students on the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. How can these schools be considered failing or underperforming in reading when 100% of their students are passing the Reading test designed by the state of Ohio?

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Westerville Parent Council is a large group of parents who are dedicated to supporting the success of all students. We are now asking each of you as legislators to be dedicated to the same. You can not continue to flat fund our public school systems and now take more dollars away under this EdChoice program and expect students in public schools to be successful. Chairman Jones and the members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for your time and for listening to my testimony. I am happy to answer any of your questions.