

To the Honorable Members of the Conference Committee for HB 9 and the Honorable Larry Obhof,

It's a rainy day in my neighborhood and a storm is threatening the future viability of my wonderful community. While the storm is most severe in my community, it has negative implications for many others and for our whole state. I'd like to share with you a bit of my family's story in this community so you'll understand why I'm asking you to rescue it from a potential human-caused disaster.

My husband and I attended public schools and between us have received undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate education at Stanford University, Harvard University, the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, Northwestern University and Tufts University. We know about and value high quality education. I studied public policy in college and that led me to pursue a career in early childhood education. I taught kindergarten for 10 years, Head Start and state prekindergarten, and was an adjunct faculty member at a college in the Chicago area. I now work to advance early literacy in Cuyahoga County.

We moved to Cleveland Heights from Chicago when my husband, a physicist, was recruited by the Cleveland Clinic where he is a senior research scientist. Some friends in Chicago who were graduates of Heights High School told us that we should move to Cleveland Heights. They sensed it was a perfect match and they were right. While our community faces various challenges, I frequently have experiences that make me feel like I live in a utopia.

Our community is racially and socio-economically integrated. It's residential, walkable and bikeable. We have 3 shopping districts and 2 libraries within walking distance of our house. We can even walk to University Circle, home to many museums and cultural and educational institutions. We've been blessed to meet and work with a vast array of wonderful people as we support efforts to continually improve our public schools and uplift all children using them.

Our neighbors and friends include musicians, including members of the Cleveland Orchestra, artists including a renowned glass artist whose work is in the Smithsonian and the Cleveland Museum of Art, our heating and cooling guy, our plumber, our handyman, our roofer, scientists, journalists, landscapers, small business people, corporate lawyers, doctors, social workers, teachers, professors at John Carroll University, Cleveland State University, Cuyahoga Community College, Kent State University, Hiram College, Case Western Reserve University and more, and of course, families working multiple jobs and struggling to make ends meet. Most of these have sent their children to public schools but a few have instead chosen one of the many private or parochial school options.

My son is a freshman at Cleveland Heights-University Heights High School and has attended our public schools since kindergarten. A number of his classmates this year have come to our high school after attending various elite private or parochial schools. A few of his friends' parents teach in one of the most exclusive private schools in the area yet choose to send their children to our public schools, schools that have received poor grades that I believe are

inaccurate and misleading (and correlate with the income level of so many families in our district).

Our schools are not failing or poor performing schools yet the inaccurate report card grades threaten to make them so, since the voucher program enacted by the state legislature has taken \$10,000,000 from our district's allocation to pay for EdChoice and other vouchers.

Our community is already taxed to the max thanks to cuts to local municipalities under the previous governor's administration which forced local tax increases to maintain services (and which helped to build up the state's rainy day fund), the unconstitutional method of funding schools in Ohio, and recent but necessary increases in our water and sewer bills.

Even with the changes in HB 9 or SB 89, our community remains unfairly penalized for no reason. It will be difficult to pass the next levy in March (necessary only because of the EdChoice fund diversions) and even if it passes, it will be divisive for our community and difficult for many to pay the accompanying tax bills. If it doesn't pass, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the ongoing progress our schools have been making. Our community's future hangs in the balance.

The story is that the vouchers were intended to help low-income children. Yet taking money from our public district that serves so many low-income families is only going to hurt many and our whole community. If our community goes down, I fear for our neighboring communities.

Do Ohio legislators want a strong, literate, educated and nimble workforce? Do they value strong communities and economic development? Do they want to attract and retain businesses large and small throughout the state? I think the answer is "yes" but the current approach to education, vouchers and funding run counter to these goals.

Governor DeWine recognizes that children need a strong start in the early years in order to excel later and that is why he has persuaded the legislature to increase funding for and support so many valuable early childhood initiatives that will pay huge dividends for our society and economy in the long term.

He read the research. It explains why districts like mine face additional challenges in advancing their students. According to Groundwork Ohio's **Ohio Early Childhood Race and Rural Equity Report:**

"Children who start behind, usually stay behind. Regardless of which metric you choose to examine, kids who have poor outcomes in one metric share the same profile of the kids who have poor outcomes in another. The data is extremely predictive in the earliest years due to the critical period of brain development that happens in a child's first five years of life. Additionally, research is clear that certain metrics are predictive of future child outcomes. For example, kindergarten readiness predicts third grade reading achievement, which, in turn, predicts eighth grade math achievement. Eighth grade math achievement predicts high school graduation, which is also predictive of postsecondary attainment.

For example: In Ohio, only 40% of kindergartners come to the classroom ready to learn. It's no surprise then, that only 43% of the adult workforce has a postsecondary degree or credential leading to a job available in Ohio today.

To improve school outcomes and increase the lifelong success of children, Ohio needs greater investments in high-quality early childhood education for our most at-risk children. It is the proven investment for kids, communities and taxpayers.

Of course, I know well that we need both the increase in investments in early childhood programs **and** a robust system of common (public) schools.

In the years that my son has attended our schools, I've seen teachers and administrators working smarter and harder, to improve policies, practices and equity for the benefit of all. Our schools aren't perfect but they're working continuously to make strides.

So I ask you to do the following to allow us to continue with this progress:

- Fix the broken report card system. It's harmful, not helpful, to our community.
- Eliminate the voucher system. At a minimum, direct fund all vouchers retroactive to the beginning of this school year. Stop sending money intended for public schools to private and parochial schools. Pay for grandfathered children and siblings from a separate state fund, not from our public school budget.
- If you must keep the voucher system, separate vouchers from the report card grades. Make them income-based.
- Pay back all of the money the state has taken from the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district for vouchers for students who've never attended and never planned to attend our public schools. If needed, use the rainy day fund for this purpose.

As I stated earlier, it's a rainy day here and a storm is brewing but you have the ability to disperse the clouds hanging over us. Please do so.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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