

February 17, 2020

Primary & Secondary Education Committee,

I work for a community-based, nonprofit behavioral health agency. More specifically, I work on a school-based team that focuses on at-risk youth. I have been in the local public schools for the past six years. While the school program allows us more consistent access to clients, it also allows us to see what is happening in the schools. What I witness is alarming. On a daily basis, not only do I witness unacceptable youth behavior, I witness teachers that either can't or won't do anything because of administrators that are worried about their state grade card. I am witnessing criminal behavior go unchecked for the sake of keeping suspension numbers down. The public school system is broken. That is my professional experience.

Personally, I am a domestic violence survivor that continues to fight an abuser whose only weapon left is that of finances. With the help of scholarships and grants (and without financial aid from my child's father), I have been able to afford my daughter a private school education. The private school education began as a priority because I can speak first hand to the difference between public and private school educations and setting a child up for success. However, it is now a priority because public schools grow more unsafe every year. It is imperative for a child to feel safe in order to learn. It is true; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs comes before Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives when discussing students and their growth in a classroom. To ignore this basic fact would lend to the continued detriment of our educational system as a whole.

Choosing EdChoice in order to continue into private high school, will help me build the foundation needed for a child to grow into a productive member of society. Without it, private education would not be an option. We recently had to move. Once I realized we were in a failing district I immediately took the steps necessary to apply for EdChoice including; prepping my child with workshops for the high school placement test, coordinating high school shadow days at all local private high schools so that she could make an informed choice, scheduled my child to take the high school placement test, which she passed and was accepted into the school of her choice, completed scholarship applications, grant applications, and high school applications, and paid all the fees that go along with it – the next of which is another \$300 in March in order to register for Freshman classes. This process began last August and we've been planning for it ever since. When will I know if I am paying money for something that I won't be able to afford in the long run?

I have assisted countless clients over the years with EdChoice. I see the difference it makes when a youth is able to step out of a broken school system and just be able to be a student and thrive in a positive environment. Now I may not be able do it for my own child? Do you know how hard these children have worked to get accepted into a high school of their choice? Do you know how excited they are to begin this chapter?

Keeping children trapped in a broken public school system is ethically wrong and a waste of taxpayer money. Changing the rules of EdChoice at this date is unfair and poor public policy. It puts the children's future in question and creates fear and anxiety in countless homes across the state.

Respectfully,

JoEllen Thibert