

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 committee, thank you for allowing the opportunity for citizens such as myself to address you regarding this important matter that is the EdChoice voucher program.

My name is Kathleen Weaver. I was born and raised in Ohio. St. Benedict was my school and my extended family from Kindergarten through grade eight. While we could often arrange a carpool ride to school in the morning, we were typically expected to walk the mile home each day. Were there times that I wished I attended the public school a block from my house? Certainly! But I am so grateful that my parents **chose** to send me where I knew my class sizes were small and the teachers were so involved and caring. I am happy that I was free to learn about, develop and practice my faith there with my school peers. Our teachers held us to a high standard and we students rose to meet the challenge. I am still thankful to Mrs Larrison for making us participate in the science fair. There is so much more than science to be learned by doing a project like that! Public speaking, for example.

With the nearest Catholic high school located over 30 minutes away, my parents **chose** to send me and my three siblings to the public high school only two blocks from our house. And, can you imagine what happened there? Some of the best years of our lives, that's what! We met new friends and participated in a wonderful variety of extra curricular clubs, sports and music. High school was not all fun and games, of course. Our parents encouraged us to challenge ourselves and made sure that we were supported by the district. I am still grateful to my mom and dad for advocating to the Board of Education that we find a way that I could take Calculus as a senior, and to Mr Pedretti for agreeing to teach me that class as an independent study. It was the support of our parents and Cambridge's public high school staff that provided us with the education and guidance we needed to be accepted into and succeed in various colleges including The University of Dayton, Miami, Cincinnati, and Vanderbilt.

Fast forward to 2008. My husband and I moved to Oakwood, Ohio just in time for our eldest to start kindergarten. Oakwood schools have long had a strong reputation for providing an exemplary education and that is what we wanted this for our four boys. For seven years, we lived in the 2.2 square mile bubble that is Oakwood. We were surrounded by other families of similar socioeconomic situations who also highly valued education. And thanks to Ohio's formulas for funding education, we all paid for our childrens' education via our property taxes. For current residents, the median property tax paid in Oakwood of \$5,145 annually. Compare that to Kettering, Oakwood's southern neighbor and location our first house, where the median property tax is \$2,494. Or consider Dayton to the north, where the median property tax paid is only \$1,163. (Figures cited are from Dayton Daily News, online Montgomery County Property Tax resource.) We **chose** this land-locked, affluent, racially homogenous (95.6% white, per census.gov) in the name of our childrens' education.

When my husband's job dictated that our family would move, I could not imagine leaving our award winning school district for... Westerville. According to the State of Ohio, Westerville schools were terrible. How could we even think about pulling our kids from the school "ranked

No. 1 of Ohio's 608 school districts in the prepared for success measure on the state report card" (Dayton Daily News), and putting them in Westerville's failing schools? It was hard for us to swallow. So, my husband **chose** to commute 90 miles each way for a *year* so that we could finish selling our house and keep the kids in their current school as long as possible. And I researched private school options!

But, something happened during that year. My husband got to know and like the community. We started to see more good things about our future move. We brought the kids to town for a high school play and our eyes were opened to just one of the wonderful things that Westerville City Schools has to offer our boys.

Today, I stand before you as a parent of two High School and two Middle School boys. My husband and I **chose** to send our children to the public schools which, according to the State of Ohio, are failing. Why? Because they are NOT failing our kids.

I hope that my story has given you insight as to where I am coming from. I believe in, and I am grateful for, the opportunities Ohio parents have when it comes to education for their kids. But I am here to tell you that the performance aspect of the EdChoice system is flawed. I nearly let Ohio's school grading system scare me away from our public schools, and that would have been unfortunate.

My kids now go to schools in a diverse district:

- students are from 63 different countries with 58 native languages
- 14.4% of our kids have disabilities and 18.7% are identified as gifted
- Economically disadvantaged kids in our buildings range from 12.6% to 67.9%

How can the state put all of this into a tidy formula that spits out what it thinks our schools success should look like? It cannot. That is why the formulas are constantly changing! And, how can schools ever be expected to aim at these moving targets?

I'll get lost if I go down the rabbit hole that is the state's portion of school funding. But I do understand that our district is in a rough place because of how fast our population has grown. We serve 1,300 more kids now than we did the last time that we opened a new building in 2003. We are projected to grow by another 1,300 students in the next 10 years. But the state has long since capped the funding that we receive. To quote our district's Treasurer/CFO Nicole Marshall, "we did not receive any state funding for approximately 3,000 of our 15,300 students" during FY2019.

Until the state of Ohio fully funds every student in the district, it is not fair that districts should sacrifice the funding that pays for any EdChoice vouchers. And Until the state of Ohio holds private schools accountable for *their* performance, it is not right that public district funds should be redirected to the EdChoice, or any similar program, based on *their* performance.

Thank you for your time and attention.