

MARYSVILLE

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Conference Committee on House Bill 9

Interested Party Testimony

Richard Smith, School Board V.P.

Legislative Liaison

February 18, 2020

Chairman Jones, members of the Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today. My name is Richard Smith and I, like all elected officials, speak for thousands of people in my community. Today, I come before you representing the students, parents and citizens of the Marysville Exempted Village School District.

From the beginning, the use of taxpayer money to fund private education in Ohio has been problematic for public schools. Money that could have been directed toward fully meeting the State's own funding formulas was diverted to support unregulated and unaccountable private schools. Most recently, provisions added by the HB 166 Conference Committee created the current issues facing this Committee. We now face the unacceptable possibility of grossly expanding voucher eligibility and the creation of a financial nightmare for public education in our State. I would remind you that the Legislature has a Constitutional obligation to provide "a thorough and efficient systems of common schools" but bears no obligation for funding private and/or for profit schools.

Ohio's voucher program, if one should exist, needs to be targeted, limited and operated under rules of transparency and accountability. Private schools receiving vouchers need to be held to the same standards of supervision and reporting as currently apply to all of Ohio's public schools.

A complicating factor in the current voucher program is the reliance on a flawed State Report Card to determine where voucher eligibility should exist. I am aware that many in the Legislature recognize the failings and faults of the Report Card and are working to create a document that is fair and representative of the accomplishments of Ohio's public schools. In light of the reality that this work is going to take time, changes to the voucher programs cannot wait for a proper resolution of this issue. Action is required now to avoid the eminent catastrophic consequences looming before us if EdChoice and other voucher programs are not reformed.

Taking a pragmatic approach, recognizing that compromise is essential to finding an adoptable solution, I urge this Committee to include in any solution the following:

- Eliminate the use of the State Report Card in any voucher program.

- Eliminate the practice of counting students receiving vouchers as part of a districts' student population, the average daily attendance.
- Create separate and independent funding of vouchers in the state budget.
- Require oversight and public accounting of funds and academic achievement equal to standards currently in place for public schools.

Additionally, I would ask that the Committee include, in any proposal recommended for passage, the following provisions:

- Dissolve the three ADCs in Youngstown City, East Cleveland City and Lorain City, effective June 30, 2020, along with creating a state-level School Transformation Board to oversee school improvement efforts and establishing a moratorium on all new ADCs.
- Repeal the territory transfer provision that was passed in the budget bill (HB 166) effective immediately.

Currently, Sub. Am. HB 9 and SB 89 are the two legislative initiatives aimed at correcting a variety of issues with the voucher programs in Ohio. Both contain positive steps. Each has limitations and shortcomings. On balance, SB 89 currently has more positive features and addresses a larger range of issues facing Ohio's public schools. It offers the greatest financial relief and protects school districts from many of the ills of the voucher system.

Arthur Tennes said, "Condemning politicians for compromising is like condemning a bus driver for driving a bus." I urge you to seek a pragmatic, effective and appropriate solution to the voucher issue. I urge you to protect public education as 9 out of 10 students in Ohio attend public schools.

Respectfully,
Richard Smith
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