

Testimony for HB 9 Conference Committee

February 19, 2020

By: Scott Karlo (Parent, Woodridge Local Schools)

Dear Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my concerns. Public education is a foundation to our democracy and your focus on these issues is appreciated.

I am a strong advocate of public education and the wise use of our tax dollars. I am not opposed to the concept of Ed Choice. I welcome those who wish to send their children to private institutions, but I recognize their need to pay for that decision. Equally, I recognize the many opportunities that exist in districts throughout Ohio that allow for open enrollment, or programs such as our 6 District Compact where various programs are housed by different schools yet open to all students within the compact.

However, I am troubled by the broken school funding model and question how my district, with nearly 40% of its student population on free and reduced lunch, is deemed wealthy. While I hear of scholarships topping out at \$6,000 for private schools, I wonder why my child only receives \$957 from the State. Even our local parochial schools get more funding than that, and the efforts to correct that issue repeatedly get line item vetoed by the recent governors.

I am equally frustrated by the lack of a level playing field. While there is talk of underperforming or failing public schools, and a desire to give our tax dollars for students to attend private alternatives, how can we be sure they are successful when they are not measured by the same standards? In addition, how can we ignore the separation of church and state spelled out in both the Federal and Ohio Constitutions? I recognize the word loopholes used to make it work, but the reality is a voucher is tax dollars, and whether it's mailed to the school or the parent's function as the carrier, those tax dollars are going to religious institutions. Our school funding model remains unconstitutional, why are we further adding to that broken model?

I urge you to keep public tax dollars for public schools with publicly elected officials to provide the needed oversight. In addition to those above, I also leave you with the following questions to ponder in your analysis of this Bill.

- Do property owners want their tax dollars going to organizations with no public oversight?
- What is the State's plan to address the economic impact on public schools if EdChoice (funded by local school budgets) were to pass? Our public schools will still have to meet all the mandates not asked of these private institutions. Will constituents appreciate the increased taxes because the only way to fund the schools are more tax levies?
- How will they address a private school's ability to reject students that don't fit their preferred criteria when public schools cannot do the same? Isn't this discrimination, especially if public dollars are in play?
- If all evidence suggests that poverty, and our failure to address it, is the real reason behind "failing schools," what is being done to aggressively address those issues? How are we bringing kids up to speed that lack the resources of others (early childhood education for instance)?
- When private school children testified last week that vouchers saved them by enabling their ability to escape their "failing public schools," what changed in their new school that allowed

them to succeed? As I understand it, the public schools are mandated by the laws passed by our legislators, so is it perhaps these educational mandates these kids escaped? If true, shouldn't you be working to solve those problems and engaging communities to help? OR is it possible these children are in school environments that are not holding them accountable to the same standards, as that seems like an important question with significant impacts to the future of our society?

I urge you to support the needs of our public schools and respect the rights of taxpayers to have those dollars distributed to organizations with proper public oversight. Let's come together to talk through the issues of poverty and solve one of the major underlying issues facing our communities and the public schools. Let's find ways to expand educational opportunities across our public districts (like the 6 District Compact), but we must keep it in the public domain. If parents wish to continue to send their children to private and religious institutions, they have that right, and they should equally have the responsibility to fund it.

Sincerely,

Scott A. Karlo