

HB 9 Conference Committee  
February 19 2020

Good evening. My name is Stephanie Dietelbach and I am here on behalf of my two children as well as the rest of the students enrolled in the LaBrae School District, located in Leavittsburg, near Warren OH. Chairman Jones and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share with you some of my concerns regarding EdChoice and my opposition to its expansion.

To begin, I want you to know a few things about me. First, I am a lifelong Republican and Christian. I mention this only to demonstrate that this is neither a partisan issue or an attack of religious liberty. Secondly, I am a Realtor, so I regularly witness the impact the health of the public schools has on a families decision whether or not to move to an area. It's often the first thing they ask me.

In preparation of this testimony, I read the testimonies of several other interested parties. Many opposed to EdChoice expansion, but some were in favor. One thing that stood out was that their arguments FOR EdChoice only underscored why so many are opposed. Several stated that since they pay taxes, they should be able to dictate where those dollars go. That might make sense if the amount paid in equalled the amount paid out, but it doesn't. The amount a student takes with them far exceeds what is allocated to them by the local property tax base and the state. The large financial discrepancy is then left to be filled in by the already overburdened public school system. One can see how quickly this could lead to a school becoming deeply in debt. So, what of the taxpayer deciding where their money goes? What about the thousands of taxpayers who don't have children? They sometimes vote for these school levies, and then, whether they supported a winning levy or not, are forced to pay taxes that were taken under the pretense that the money was going to the local public school. Most educated home owners know there is a direct correlation between home values and the quality of the local school district. Which brings me to the second issue I saw addressed in one of the pro EdChoice testimonies. It was stated that they did not want to send their child to the public school because classes were too big and teachers were overworked. They said they could not sell their house to move to a better district because no one wants to buy homes in that area because of the quality of the public schools. Exactly! So siphoning public money away from its intended purpose is going to make any of this better? Of course not! It only serves to further destroy communities and depreciate home values.

We need to protect our public schools and allow them to keep the tax dollars that were collected on their behalf. Allow EdChoice to be truly financially need based and for the added expense to be picked up by a separate fund set aside by the state. This financial vacuum should never be the responsibility of the public school. And imagine what could happen if some of the \$73.3 million dollars of EdChoice annual expansion dollars were directed to public school funding? Particularly to those schools in lower income areas to make up for some of the discrepancies between them and their affluent public school counterparts? Should it not be our goal to allow our public schools to be the centers of a thriving community and a place that is a true reflection of our cultural, racial, ethnic, economic, and religious diversity? That is the world they will live in once they graduate, so our schools should mirror that reality.

Private schools don't have to accept everyone nor do they have to adhere to the same rigorous testing as public schools. By their own admission, they underperform compared to public schools. Public schools graduation rate is 90.1%. And yet we are poised to open the floodgates of who is eligible to attend these often underperforming, underregulated schools at the expense of the taxpayers and our precious public schools.

I am not against private, religious, or charter schools. I fully support a parents right to send their children to whichever type of school they choose or to homeschool. What I cannot agree with is the disproportionate amount of money taken from the public tax base and the over inflated need based income benchmark. A family of four could make up to \$78,600 a year and still be awarded a \$3,000 a year taxpayer subsidy to offset, or cover, private school tuition.

I know this committee has heard numerous testimonies for and against this issue over the last several days. I know you have had all kinds of numbers and statistics thrown at you. I sympathize! This has to be very tiresome.

But I want to leave you with an appeal to your sense of civic duty and your humanity. The biggest losers in this stand to be our most at risk kids. The poorest, most marginalized among us. The public school is often the only safe place they know. The only place they can get regular meals and have their health, hygiene, and clothing needs looked after. Many of these children go home to drug addicted or absentee parents or caretakers. These kids will be the ones left behind. Left to a path that will only perpetuate the cycle of poverty, crime, drugs, and ignorance. It is our duty as citizens of this great state of Ohio to protect our children and do our best to give them all as equal a footing as possible. And it's time to be honest with ourselves- it's not our schools that are failing, it's we that are failing them.

Chairman Jones and members of the committee, thank you very much for your time and allowing me to express my views on this issue. I will be happy to answer any questions.