

Good evening Representative Jones, Senator Huffman, Senator Peterson, Senator Fedor, Representative Edwards and Representative Robinson, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Debbie Dunlap, and I am a 20-plus year resident of Reynoldsburg, Ohio, and the current Board of Education President, along with the newly elected Chair of the Reynoldsburg Education Foundation. I am here today to lay before you some of my concerns about the state's EdChoice program and some thoughts on the importance of public education in the great state of Ohio.

To give you a little background on myself, I grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, a medium-sized industrial town of about 100,000 people. My mom was a single mother raising five children on her own working as a waitress, assembly line worker, and later businessowner before going on welfare and food stamps in order to return to college full time and earn her degree in teaching as a means of providing for her family in a much more meaningful and consistent way. During that time, I attended parochial school in Erie, paid for through reduced tuition costs, scholarship from the Diocese of Erie, and later through my own employment in high school at a local restaurant. This was a choice by my mother who felt important that I attend catholic school for reasons of her own at the time— but in no way did any public funds go to pay for that tuition.

Following my graduation from college, and a five-year stint in Germany where I worked for both the Army and the Department of Defense in Public Affairs, my husband and I decided to return to the United States, choosing Reynoldsburg as our landing place because of the close-knit community, the good schools, and the affordable housing. There, we started a family. I have three children, two graduates of Reynoldsburg City Schools, and one a current Freshman. My children have enjoyed positive experiences, challenging curriculum, and incredible opportunities being a part of the Reynoldsburg City School District – for the most part. You may remember in 2014 When our district suffered from a teacher's strike due to growing demands on teachers and unfair burdens being imposed by the state. Suffice to say that NO ONE emerges from such an experience without scars. But we worked through those tough times as a community – because that is what public education is all about – community. Reynoldsburg emerged from those very troubled times a stronger community. Not because the schools operated inside some kind of vacuum or without accountability, but because the schools, the staff, and kids, and the families who put them there MAKE UP the fabric of our community. We rallied together, we bonded, we spoke out, and we emerged a stronger community. In fact, those very trying times in particular were what inspired me to run for office and advocate for my community. I am now in my second term serving the people of my community on Reynoldsburg's Board of Education. I am the eyes and ears of my community – the children, the families, the senior citizens, the businesses. The city and our schools walk hand-in-hand together, investing in Reynoldsburg for the sake of everyone who lives and thrives there. Recently, our community has changed drastically. We have welcomed to Reynoldsburg many Bhutanese and Nepali refugees who have settled in Reynoldsburg, bought homes, opened businesses, fill our classrooms, serve on our student council – who have become part of the fabric of our community. Our schools and our city, continue to walk hand-in-hand together because that IS what makes up the fabric of a community. Our public schools are vital to the success of Reynoldsburg. They were established in 1868 – and they continue to serve students and families today – because we are never going away. Accountable to our voters, myself and my fellow Board Members

work with voters, families, the state and our administration in providing the BEST education we can. We are vested because we ARE that fabric. We are the community. And while that fabric is constantly changing to include new cultures, new experiences, new ideas and new faces – one thing remains constant – we are woven together and strong together – a community. Public education is like that – public schools are the foundation of our community and enjoy the support of that community. But when the state takes needed dollars away, that fabric is weakened. And because we are only as strong as a community as the threads that bring us together – weakening one part weakens the whole.

I was an education reporter for 15 years and understand this moving target that educators have been made to shoot for. It's been difficult on school districts and communities, but they continue to move with the bar. And sometimes, schools miss their mark, and must self-reflect before changing course and correcting their course. It's a given in any industry. But taking essential funding away from districts or schools working to change course is **not** an answer to improvement. And it attacks not only our schools, but that very fabric of our communities.

Reynoldsburg's recent Quality Profile is filled with successes that are not reflected on state report cards, or with letter grades and colorful bar graphs and pie charts. Successes like:

- Our partnerships with Battelle, Columbus State, Otterbein, the Ohio Learning Network, Ballet Met, the Central Ohio Technical College, Slow Foods, and more.
- Our community supporters who invest in our kids like TS Tech, Dynalab, the Limited and Dynamix to name a few.
- Our quality and award-winning schools like the STEAM Designated Herbert Mills Elementary, and STEM designated schools like Summit Road Elementary, STEM Middle at Baldwin Road Junior High, and our eSTEM Academy and HS2 Academy at Reynoldsburg High School.
- Our incredible students like Mackenzie Kaminski and Bezawit Sahile who both earned their associate's degrees at the same time as their high school diplomas last year.
- The Class of 2019 -- students who earned 4,215 college credits and over \$10 million in academic scholarships.
- Last year's 526 graduates who complete some 260 internships.
- Our incredible staff, like Rob Neidermeyer who was selected as District 9's Ohio Teacher of the Year – or Trevor Horn who's work with students and the Slow Food movement has been highlighted in several publications including the front cover of Edible Columbus and featured at the Ohio School Boards Association Capital Conference.
- I could go on and on.

See, schools are successful – schools that might otherwise not fare as well on the state report card and who might unjustly face punishment – like the loss of state dollars that are helping to weave the very strong fabric of our community, dollars that go to other schools who do **not** share the same accountability we do, who can turn students away because of their background, culture, way of life, academic standing, or other reasons; who do **not** answer to local constituents; who may be here today –

but gone tomorrow. Like YOU, I am accountable to my constituents, essential to the checks and balances of governing bodies – particularly those who govern (I would argue) the most precious commodity in the state – our children – our future.

I ask you today to please consider the importance of public education and public schools as part of the fabric of our communities that make up the great state of Ohio. Taking state dollars away is not an answer to improving the education of our youth. Giving state dollars to entities that do not operate under the same accountability as public institutions is not the answer to improving the education of our youth. I ask you to please take into account this testimony when deliberating the future of Ohio's EdChoice program in the coming weeks, months, and years.

Thank you.