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“Working Together for our Kids”

Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers
HB 9 Conference Committee
Thursday, February 20, 2020

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Jennifer Gent. I am a Reading Teacher in the Washington Local School district and have also been elected to serve as the President of the Teachers Association of Washington Local Schools (TAWLS) located in Toledo, Ohio. On behalf of my 495 members and the roughly 7,000 students we serve, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the EdChoice Voucher Program.

Over the course of the past 6 years, my district has not received \$77 million dollars in state funding due to being a “capped” school district. In essence, we are not receiving ANY state funding for roughly 30% of our current student population....30%...roughly 2000 of our current students!

Despite being short changed in our state funding year after year, we continue to strive to the best of our abilities to provide an excellent education complete with individual attention which will lead to infinite opportunities for ALL of our students.

As a result of state funding being withheld, recently my district was forced to reach out to our Washington Local community for additional local financial support to maintain current programs and services. In November of 2019, our amazing community passed a monumental operating levy and bond issue in support of OUR Washington Local students and community. We were grateful to our community for their support and excited for the opportunities the passage of our levy would provide OUR Washington Local students. Sadly, this excitement was short lived.

A week later we were crushed to learn that eight of our eleven school buildings were labeled as “failing” based upon flawed school report cards. This unjust labeling results in dire consequences moving forward in our district’s ability to provide educational excellence for our current students. Furthermore, one fourth of voter approved new funding from our recent levy passage in November is now earmarked to fund EdChoice vouchers rather than current programs and services for our 7,000 students.

Myself, my neighbors and my Washington Local community voted “yes” to support Washington Local public school students. We did not vote to have our local tax dollars fund private school tuition. Current legislation is resulting in our local tax dollars being stolen away from our students to fund private school tuition via the EdChoice program.

In addition, continued loss of local revenue will result in further negative implications such as larger class sizes and a reduction in programs and services for our students. Moreover, an even greater burden will be placed on local tax payers to fill the void with this additional unpredictable loss of funding.

Both the House and the Senate have passed separate bills to address voucher funding moving forward. We are opposed to HB 9 as it would only provide temporary and partial relief to Ohio’s public schools and the students they serve. Under this legislation, new EdChoice vouchers would continue to be issued and deductions from local schools would continue to grow. This plan would pose continued harm to the 7,000 students in Washington Local Schools.

On behalf of the educators in my district, we fully support SB 89 as passed by the House as it would fund vouchers directly by the state rather than deducting funding from our school district. In addition, SB 89 would move away from voucher eligibility based on a report card system that we all know is flawed.

The language of SB 89 as passed by the House is the best path moving forward. SB 89 maintains support for current voucher recipients through grandfathering and moves toward direct state funding of vouchers rather than removing vital funding from local school districts. On behalf of my colleagues, our students and my own children, one of which is with us tonight, I urge the members of this committee and our legislative leaders to come to a resolution on this issue that will not result in further harm to our public schools and the students we serve.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to address this body. I am happy to address your questions at this time..

