

Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers
HB 9 Conference Committee

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Kathryn Suzanne Keller. I am a teacher of 20 years with the Portsmouth City School District. I serve as the president of the Portsmouth City Teachers' Association. On behalf of our 149 members, who service 1,715 students, I thank you for your attention to my comments on the EdChoice Voucher Program.

I would like to speak directly about my school district. This year \$880,000 in state funding was deducted from the Portsmouth City School District due to EdChoice. Our students lose because of EdChoice. Taking away money from 1,715 students is not a way to improve public education.

Our school district is labeled "failing" due to a flawed public education report card and the deduction of state funding. We are not the numbers on your spread sheets. Our students succeed every day despite the poverty and despair of their lives. We are a district that embraces children plagued by the opioid epidemic, who combat mental health issues, who have generational poverty. Our students are those who struggle to make it to school, but they come. Who are often the caretakers of their siblings, or who are being cared for by a sibling, a grandparent, or ignored by addicted parents but they come to school. Students who receive free breakfast and lunch, and food pantry within the school to combat hunger and provide basic hygiene. Our public school hasn't failed. Society and laws continue to fail our students. The decisions to continue and expand the voucher program and remove money from cash-strapped districts make a difficult job that much harder.

I ask you, the decision makers for my State, for my students, is this program a way to move the state of Public Education forward? Is this policy making public education better?

It's time to move in a new direction. I urge you to support Senate Bill 89 as passed by the House. I agree with OEA president Scott DiMauro that the changes proposed in SB 89 would help move away from eligibility based on flawed report cards and towards a program that funds vouchers directly by the state rather than deducting for aid to public schools.

It is not my desire to place blame, but to offer support to correct a system that does not favor the children of our State, who by my opinion deserve your best. Be the example to the generations awaiting fiscal and educational equality.

I thank you for your attention.