



CRESTVIEW LOCAL SCHOOLS

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Chairman Jones and Members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee,

I echo the appreciation of others who have spoken before me and thank you for the opportunity to address the committee regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher Program. My name is Kathy Mollenkopf, and I have the privilege of serving as Superintendent for Crestview Local Schools in Van Wert County.

For me, the core of the debate on the EdChoice Voucher Program must find its way back to the fundamentals established in Ohio's Constitution. Article VI.02 states that the *General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a **thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state; but no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state.*** First and foremost, our forefathers recognized the importance of education and establishing laws that would govern the institution of education in a complete, well-organized, and competent manner that they defined as a *thorough and efficient system*. Also expressed in the article is their desire for *common* schools throughout our state. The adjective *common* to describe the schools scattered throughout our great state carries a weighty meaning because of what it implies. These common schools would have similar conventions, similar standards, and similar characteristics. Transporting our forefathers' concept of *common* schools to a present-day application, it would appear that *common* schools would fulfil the same requirements in terms of EMIS reporting and data collection, in terms of transparency on when and how public dollars are spent, in terms of licensing requirements, and in terms of assessing student performance. It also appears that our forefathers were also quite definitive in stating that *no religious or other sect shall have exclusive right to or control of* educational funding from the state. While it is apparent that the article does not state that a religious or other sect cannot have access to public funds for educational purposes, any proposed expansion of an EdChoice Voucher Program certainly augments the parameters for exclusivity and broadens the scope of control. This is especially if the estimate of 70% of Ohio's public school districts facing at least one voucher-eligible school within its boundaries by April 1 of this year holds true.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, in the public school district at which I now serve as Superintendent, I have also served as a building principal, as a teacher, as an athletic director, as a transportation supervisor, and as a coach. But most importantly, I am a proud graduate of Crestview Local Schools. Our small, rural public school district boasts residents that have supported all new levies, renewal levies and income taxes presented to them since 1988. Our public school district is the center of our community. The potential exposure to the expansion of the EdChoice Voucher deductions from our flat-funded state revenue exposes the viability of my district's financial health. My district's share of the State Share Index is 28.92%. That means my district does not receive \$6020 per student; we receive \$1740.98. That means that money voted in by our taxpayers for our school district to educate our students is at risk of being compromised with an EdChoice Voucher expansion.

Further compounding my concern is the reality that presents itself on my district SFPR Report for February 14, 2020. In fiscal year 2019, my district received state support totaling \$4,363,758.49 based upon an ADM of 771.26. In fiscal year 2020, my district will collect state support equal to fiscal year 2019. However, our ADM increased approximately 16 students, and we received no additional state funding. This inconsistency is not unlike other public school districts across the state who see increased student numbers but flat-funding. What does this mean, though, in terms of the EdChoice Voucher program? My district is required to educate more students with less funding; however, the EdChoice Voucher program does not take that into consideration when potential voucher funds are directly deducted from the district.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, the EdChoice Voucher issue before you is not about a parent's right to choice; parents should and do have that right. The issue before you is who is responsible, who is obligated to pay for that choice. Let's not deduct from the funds provided to the *common* public schools for the purpose of educating children whose parents have chosen private or parochial education vouchers. I dare say, that I would like this arm of the EdChoice Voucher Program to be completely eliminated, but a more realistic compromise may be reached by removing the eligibility requirements for access to vouchers based upon performance on Local Report Cards and paying for its entirety out of state funds provided as income-based needs to assure that the neediest of students receive the EdChoice Voucher opportunity.

Again, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide input on the EdChoice Voucher program.