

Fort Frye Local School District

Office of the Treasurer

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Good evening, Chairman Jones and members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Stacy Bolden and I am the Treasurer of Fort Frye Local School District in rural Southeast Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this evening about the Educational Choice Scholarship program and the effects that it has on public schools.

I want to begin by thanking you for your willingness to consider changing the current voucher program which inaccurately labels hundreds of public schools as “underperforming” using a flawed grading system. Fort Frye High School is one of these schools labeled as EdChoice eligible which is what brings me here this evening. Although House Bill 9 would likely remove our high school from being EdChoice eligible, I am in support of Senate Bill 89 because it would put an end to all public schools and their taxpayers paying for private school tuition by implementing an income-based program only. I believe that if taxpayers knew and understood that their tax dollars were being routed to pay for private school tuition with this voucher program they would be outraged.

The EdChoice voucher program would add to the already difficult task of completing a public school’s budget. Even though the only brick and mortar private schools in our area only serve elementary grades at this time, we can see how the list of eligible students in Ohio is growing at an exponential rate. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the future financial impact is something that all school systems in Ohio need to fear. How do

we accurately forecast the number of students who will take advantage of public funds to pay for his/her private education?

Fort Frye receives \$1,827 of the \$6,020 per pupil basic aid set by the state and will pay up to \$6,000 for each high school student who receives a voucher. We spend \$9,234 per pupil district-wide. Although it may seem that we would “save” money by only paying \$6,000 per pupil to attend a private school, this assumption is not accurate. We will still have to pay a teacher whether there are 18 or 25 students in the class and we still have the same overhead costs unless we are forced to cut programs and educational opportunities because our public funds are being routed to private schools which will only hurt the students remaining at our public school.

We have a Catholic-based private school within our District’s physical boundaries and their state auxiliary funds are run through our District and are to be used for non-religious purposes. With the current voucher program, private school tuition that is paid by the state and locally funded school District is essentially using taxpayer’s dollars to pay for religious education. I understand that the U.S. Supreme Court concluded in 2002 that the voucher system at that time did not violate the Establishment Clause separating church and state but I don’t believe our taxpayers would agree. We as a public school District have to be vigilant not to violate this clause because we are publicly funded, but will be expected to send our public dollars to a religion based private school under the voucher program.

If our legislators are adamant that funding to private schools via vouchers needs to be provided, then the state should budget for this expense directly rather than allowing this unpredictable budgetary item to fall at the expense of public schools who are already underfunded. Why would we add to the expenses of public school districts when we cannot yet agree on an adequate state funding formula?

Again, I am thankful for this opportunity to share this testimony.