Chairman Jones and distinguished members the Conference on House Bill 9, my name is Edward Arthur Shure, President of the Summit Christian School Board of Education, located in in Cuyahoga Falls, in the great State of Ohio. It is an honor to stand before you today to share testimony about Summit Christian School, a well-established EdChoice provider, and our perspective on House Bill 9. I am joined by my distinguished board colleague, Brian McCort, and six of our wonderful and gifted students, whom you will hear from shortly.

Summit Christian School is a K-8 school and has been in existence since 1982. In July of 2017 we purchased the Woodridge Primary School in Cuyahoga Falls and moved into our new home for the 2018-2019 school year. The new 19-classroom facility, effectively doubling our previously leased space, has already been put to great use as the school has doubled certain grades and anticipates even more expansion over the next five years.

When you walk into a classroom at our school, a diverse group of children rise to greet you. They make eye contact as together they welcome you.

We have effectively replaced traditional rules-based discipline with high expectations and accountability and we have infused this in every aspect of the school's culture. Respect is not just taught, it is modeled. We strive to be a school that makes faith-based and academic pursuits engaging so that students will learn, grow, and positively impact the world.

Our current enrollment is just under 190 students. The diversity of these students cuts across race, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, and socioeconomic status. The school is a microcosm of our community and our students have learned to, and now embrace, interacting across what adults often perceive as barriers. In the 19-20 school year 46% of enrolled students are Asian/International, 28% are African-American, 21% are Caucasian, and 5% are Other/Mixed Race. Over 90% of students are considered low-income and many attend the school through EdChoice. At Summit we openly welcome international students whose families are refugees from countries including Thailand, Nepal, and Myanmar. Through partnerships with community agencies like Urban Vision Ministry in North Akron, the school actively outreaches to these communities. It is hugely important to note that most of the school's Asian students have escaped persecution in their native country as refugees and speak English as their second language. It isn’t uncommon to hear these children referred to as “the forgotten children”. Many are now in leadership roles in our school in the areas of academics, sports, the arts, Student Council, and many others.

I am proud to say that everyone at Summit Christian School views student diversity as a monumental strength of the school. In fact, at our recent strategic planning sessions, the Board felt so strongly about diversity in our school that we made it one of the four pillars in our strategic plan. For those in need we provide free tutoring. Students will participate in a tremendous number of field trips in the course of their time at our school. In fact, the 5th and 6th graders will be visiting this very State House thanks to the
Testimony of Edward Arthur Shure

generosity of Senator Roegner and her team. We have a 99% success rate on the third grade reading guarantee and students who graduate from Summit have gone on to attend the best high schools in the region.

Distinguished Conference members, parents have a right to choose where their children attend schools. It is neither the child’s nor the parent’s fault that school districts across our State are deemed failing. Do I agree with my public school colleagues that the State Report Card needs overhauling? Absolutely. Do I feel that doing away with the performance based scholarships will solve the problem? Absolutely not. To begin with I believe that much of the $121m in expansion funds will run out by accommodating the transfer of existing EdChoice students, let alone when you add in the high percentage of Ohio’s 1.7 million students who would be eligible by their income level. When you say that children of a certain income level will qualify, do you mean that all children beneath the income threshold will have the chance to receive the scholarship or that they simply COULD receive it? I'm concerned about where those dollars will come from. I live and work in Cuyahoga Falls. I am blessed to be able to pay for my daughter’s education at Summit and I also pay taxes that support our public schools. What about the families living in a school district where the unthinkable happens daily. Where interruptions to learning occur all throughout the day. Parents deserve the choice to send their children to a school that is safe and will best prepare them for the challenges of life and higher education. You're about to meet six of our students that are very much representative of the larger population of our school. These precious students and their friends back home deserve the best opportunities in life. They don’t want to lose the ability to attend a wonderful school and have to return to an unsafe environment where, at no fault of the teachers, discipline and other issues outweigh their ability to learn. Mr. Chairman, members of the Conference, these children are our future. They need and deserve a choice. Thank you for voting in favor of House Bill 9 to keep the performance based scholarship alive.
Sha Wah Shee Testimony

Chairman Jones and members of the Conference on House Bill 9, my name is Sha Wah Shee and I am a 7th grade student at Summit Christian School in Cuyahoga Falls.

I live in Akron, Ohio. My parents are from Burma. My sister and I were born in Thailand. We moved to America when I was very young and have lived in Akron ever since. In America, I am given great education at Summit Christian School. I have gone to SCS for almost 7 years now and there is not one year that I haven’t enjoyed. 2 years ago, my teachers noticed I was doing so well in my learning that they permitted me to skip a grade. I love SCS because they make me feel welcomed. There are so many kind people and great opportunities to learn and grow such as student council which can teach us to be better leaders and to work as a team to achieve our goals. I am so thankful for Ed Choice! It gives me the education that I need.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today
Kevin Ebie Testimony

Chairman Jones and members of the Conference on House Bill 9, my name is Kevin Ebie and I am a 7th grade student at Summit Christian School in Cuyahoga Falls.

- I live in Akron, Ohio. My family and I were all born in America. I have 5 siblings. Three of my siblings attend Summit Christian School. It is wonderful to have my siblings at the same school as me. Without Ed Choice, we would be split up at different schools and that would make life very difficult for my family.
- I love Summit Christian School because of the love that the staff and teachers’ love for us. They are the people who push us to do our very best. They want us to succeed in life.
- I also love SCS because of the diversity that we have. There are students from many different countries at our school and I wouldn’t have met them if the Ed Choice scholarship wasn’t available to me.
- Another thing I like about SCS is being on our student council. Being on student council gives me leadership opportunities that I haven’t had before. I really like being a leader at my school because this is the first school where I feel like I fit in.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today
Magdalena Tolmachev Testimony

Chairman Jones and members of the Conference on House Bill 9, my name is Magdalena Tolmachev and I am a 8th grade student at Summit Christian School in Cuyahoga Falls.

I live in Cuyahoga Falls. My family is from America and Macedonia (the country). I was born in Skopje, Macedonia. I love Summit Christian School because I’ve been going there since kindergarten and they have never given me a reason not to love it. I love how much diversity is in my school. My school feels like a family. I’ve known some of the children there for a short while and some for a long time and they’ve been like siblings to me. I love to watch them all grow.

My actual siblings and I (I have 4 siblings) have been privileged to have my mother teach us English before we moved to America permanently. It’s been easy to communicate but my dad and I still have trouble pronouncing on spelling words.

My family has used Ed Choice and it gave us a better chance for a good education, especially when you are paying for 5 children to get the best education for them. At our school, where you come from doesn’t matter. I personally have seen it as normal to have kids from many different countries in my school. We’re all just kids trying to get a great education. Without Ed Choice, many families would not have had the chance to go to a good, welcoming school like mine.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today
Kimyata Cooper Testimony

Chairman Jones and members of the Conference on House Bill 9, my name is Kimyata Cooper and I am a 5th grade student at Summit Christian School in Cuyahoga Falls.

I grew up with a rough start in life. I was kidnapped by my mother multiple times and my father passed away when I was only 6 years old. My three siblings and I are currently living with my grandmother and her husband. My grandmother has been determined to make sure that we got a good education at a Christian school. When I started attending Summit Christian School I got horrible grades because was finally being challenged and it built character. I barely learned anything at the other school I was going to. But being at SCS is different. I was learning things left and right, making new friends right away, and the teachers are so kind and caring. I value Ed Choice because if makes it possible for me to go to a school where we do lots of STEM challenges, we learn about the world around us, and we are raising chickens! My class got to name one of the chickens and we named her Eclipse because she’s black and white. I love my school and I wish to continue there. The only way that can happen is with the Ed Choice Scholarship.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today.
Chairman Jones and members of the Conference on House Bill 9, my name is Emma Wah and I am a 7th grade student at Summit Christian School in Cuyahoga Falls.

I live in Akron but I go to school in Cuyahoga Falls. Although my siblings and I were born and raised in Akron, my parents were born in Burma. While growing up in Burma, their families had to flee to refugee camps in Thailand for their safety. My parents took the opportunity to come and live in the U.S. because they wanted a better life for our family. After a couple years of public school, I was able to go to Summit Christian School by using the Ed Choice Scholarship. I love SCS because of the impact that it has brought to me and my family. There’s never a day I go to school without seeing a smile on many student’s faces. I also love the diversity. There are students from all around the world at SCS. As a middle schooler, I love how our middle school works, from our electives that include performing and visual arts to our amazing teachers. We are even raising chickens at our school. Because of Ed Choice, I am able to go to a school that I love and that loves me!

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today.
Bella Gomez Testimony

Chairman Jones and members of the Conference on House Bill 9, my name is Bella Gomez and I am a 7th grade student at Summit Christian School in Cuyahoga Falls.

I live in Cuyahoga Falls. I am from American however my father is from Honduras. My family speaks both English and Spanish. Summit Christian School is a place where children from all over the world can come together to learn and experience the Lord. It is filled with families who cannot afford private school tuition and Ed Choice has given them the opportunity to learn at the school that best fits them. It has helped my family in the past and has been a blessing to many others families. As a member of the student council, I believe that by testifying on behalf of my peers, I may support their opportunities with Ed Choice. At Summit Christian, we have students from America, Thailand, Burma, Nepal, China, Macedonia, Turkey, and more. Each has unique talents that our teachers use to enhance our learning experience. Our school is also a refuge for those who need the Lord and to those who have escaped from tragedy. Everyone is treated as an equal. Our teachers are our friends, our classmates are brothers and sisters, and our school is a family. Our unity makes us stronger and Ed Choice makes it possible for so many of our brothers and sisters to access our beautiful school. Students deserve places like Summit Christian and Ed Choice is the gateway to it. The joy we experience within our school is only possible when we live boldly for Christ and our teachers have taught us how to do so.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today
Brian McCort Testimony

Chairman Jones and members of the conference on house bill 9 my name is Brian McCort and I am a board member at Summit Christian School in Cuyahoga Falls. I am here today to represent the many families that depend on EdChoice funds for their children’s education. While I understand that this bill has many complex components, I want to urge you to protect the ability for families that are in failing school districts and families that fall within a certain socioeconomic, the opportunity to have choice in the education of their children.

Summit Christian School is a K through 8 school with a student body of roughly 190 students, of which 92% are Ed Choice families. Of the families who send their children to Summit Christian School 64% fall below 130% of the poverty level and 80% below 185% of the poverty level. These families would never be able to afford a private school education if it was not for Ed Choice.

While I am not here to discuss or argue the merits of the report card system by which school districts are deemed passing or failing, I do want to take this opportunity to educate the members of the conference the difficulty in operating a school under the current Ed Choice funding amounts. As you know the intent of EdChoice is to allow families to seek education outside of their school districts based on certain criteria. To allow children from low income and failing areas to succeed and progress through school. This very strategy is at risk as schools like Summit Christian are forced to operate a school on funds that are a small fraction of what the public schools are able to attain through state funds, fund raising and taxes. In many cases even when a student chooses to come to Summit Christian their public school continues to get thousands of dollars of state funds even thought that child is not at the school.

Summit Christian can only afford to pay its teachers at 50% of the pay scale of the public schools. We cannot afford extracurricular programs, to invest in our facility and grounds or to have after school programs. We have no ability to raise funds through taxes and levies. We cannot raise funds through increased tuition or fundraising through families due to the socioeconomics I’ve already mentioned. Schools like Summit Christian are an integral part of the success of the objectives of EdChoice. One that as I mentioned is at risk. If we cannot hire teachers at competitive wages, we will not be able to maintain our viability. If we cannot afford extracurricular programs, then we allow these children to miss out on incredibly important components of the school experience.

In closing not only am I here to urge the members to safeguard EdChoice for these families and for schools like Summit Christian but to finally realize that if these amounts are not raised to allow schools that operate nearly entirely dependent on EdChoice, this strategy will fail.

Thank you
Brian McCort
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