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Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Timothy L. Saxton, superintendent of the Boardman Local Schools.

Because of the compounded impact of being a "capped" district and the loss of Tangible Personal Property taxes, in May of 2018, we were on the ballot with a new money levy - which our taxpayers did support. Passage of this levy allowed the Boardman Local Schools to continue to offer a diverse curriculum that included comprehensive arts and music programming. The passage of that levy was only part of solving our financial situation. We made a promise to do our part with staff reductions and to be creative and proactive in exploring additional ways to reduce costs.

We honored that promise by closing one of our elementary buildings this school year. Closing a neighborhood elementary school is a very emotional event for staff, students, parents, and alumni. With a reduction in classified and certified staff plus reduced operating costs, we are projecting a \$750,000 savings per year.

EdChoice will have a severe impact on our efforts to be fiscally responsible. A value-added metric triggered two of our buildings to be identified as EdChoice, creating a potential \$400,000 - \$800,000 loss per year. This will negate most of the savings we were able to accomplish and most likely force us into another financial crisis. There will be two ways to address this crisis - put another levy on the ballot, or cut programs. The levy is not a legitimate option. Our community has strongly expressed in clear words that they are taxed out and will say "no" to a new levy. The only viable option then is to eliminate and reduce the very same programs that the Boardman community supported with the passage of the May 2018 levy.

Is EdChoice a school performance issue? All of our buildings have A's, B's, or C's as overall report card grades. The district received an A rating in Gap Closing, the metric that specifically demonstrates performance expectations for our most vulnerable populations of students in English language arts, math, and graduation. Two of our buildings are national Blue Ribbon awardees with West Blvd Elementary receiving its second Blue Ribbon nomination this school year. Boardman High School has one of the most successful advanced placement programs in our area, being honored with Gold and Silver awards nationally and our district music program has been recognized with a Grammy Signature School award.

Is this a choice about opportunities for all students, especially those of poverty? Like most public schools, we provide a free breakfast and a free lunch for those in need and now are creating a food truck to provide free lunches over the summer. We provide transportation for every student. We have partnered with local agencies to build an early warning system to identify and intervene with students who become at risk in academics, attendance or behavior. Years before we received wellness funds, we partnered with our local mental health agencies and placed

professional counselors in our buildings to help children overcome additional barriers to achievement. Students of diverse financial and educational needs are being successfully serviced at the Boardman Local Schools.

Is this is a choice about faith? From the Scriptures, in Matthew 22:36-39 (NIV), Christ is asked, 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

We are commanded to “Love your neighbor as yourself”. Every day in the Boardman Schools I witness teachers, counselors, administrators, and classified staff live out that commandment. Staff have organized food pantries to feed hungry students as they leave for the day, created “Clothing Closets” for our female students to access formal dance attire and for the guys to have dress shirts, ties, and suits. I’ve witnessed staff organize and pay for a student’s much needed dental work that the family could not afford. I’ve seen coaches organize a fundraiser so a student could have a wheelchair to compete in track. If you are looking for faith, then I cannot think of a finer example of faith in action than what public school educators do every day for the students of Ohio.

The future of EdChoice is at a real crossroads. Do you as leaders move forward with a performance-based eligibility that relies on a flawed report card? Do you move forward with an income-based eligibility that may be pulling students out of a public school that has been designed to serve those same impoverished students? I prefer that EdChoice be eliminated but if I had to choose, then the House’s version would be my preference because of the direct state funding system. However, my ask is that the final plan must ensure that providers receiving state or local tax dollars are held accountable. Speaking on behalf of the Boardman Local Schools, we are not afraid of competition. However, all participants must be held to the same fiscal and academic accountability and transparency. If not, how do parents, educators and state leaders truly evaluate the effectiveness of this decision?

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 conference committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide input regarding Ohio’s EdChoice Voucher program. I am happy to address your questions.