

## **Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers**

### **HB 9 Conference Committee**

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

I come before you to express my support for Senate Bill 89 as passed by the House. I am a proud product of Tiffin City School and the Ohio State University. I became a teacher because I wanted to serve and work in our public schools. Public schools shape Ohio's future.

First let me speak to you as a peer as I am currently serving on board of education in Grandview Heights. Please understand that my comments are my own and are not being made on behalf of the Grandview Heights Board of Education or School District. One of the biggest takeaways that I have learned is that, there are two things that people care the most about: our children and money.

People move to Grandview so their children can attend our excellent schools. We are proud of the achievements of our students and the hard work of our teachers, parents and community to support that achievement. Our last levy passed with only 200 votes, with those opposed to the levy being concerned with the increase in property taxes. There are neighbors who won't talk to each other and community that now needs healed. I could not imagine having to go to my community and tell them that we would be losing money due to students attending private schools, schools not in our district, on their dime.

The loss of our local dollars impacts students who remain in the public schools. When funding is deducted from school districts, it forces district officials to make cuts that result in a loss of service and opportunity for students choosing to attend their public school. Please tell me how this would play out when I talk to my constituents? We have one of the best public schools in the state and now we could potentially have to make cuts, change class sizes, and generally downgrade our schools for students that would be going to other, private schools. We are fortunate to not be deemed a failing school by Ohio's current report card metrics. I say fortunate because, as this committee has heard, there are similar schools throughout the state (schools rated A, B, or C) that were on that list. With our broken report card system and arbitrary metrics, the excellent public schools I represent could easily be put on a list in the future, like many other schools have this year.

Public school districts are required to pay \$4,650 for vouchers for grades K-8 and \$6,000 for grades 9-12. Our district doesn't even receive \$6,000 per student as district, so not only are we, as local governing body, paying for a student to not attend our school but we are paying more?!?

SB 89 would halt the practice of awarding private school tuition vouchers based on a flawed report card system, paid for by school districts. Instead, vouchers would be awarded to students solely based on family income, the priority being those students most in need. The costs for this income-based program would continue to be covered by state. It would remove the program's reliance on a flawed report card system that currently punishes districts. Going forward, local funds would no longer be required to subsidize private school tuition.

As a board member, when I talk to community members there is no way I can support the Educational Choice Scholarship (EdChoice) Program. It takes money away from our community's schools, our taxpayers, and will downgrade the quality of education that our students receive.

In addition to being a board member, I am an educator in Westerville City Schools. In Westerville, I see the negative impact of EdChoice.

I serve on part of my district leadership team; where we spend hours pouring over data to determine the right path forward for our students. Many educators that have testified over the last two weeks have talked about the broken K-3 literacy measure on the state report card. Buildings are considered EdChoice eligible if they have a D or F for K-3 literacy. Almost half of Ohio's school buildings receive a D or F on this measure because you can get that grade even if over 90% of your students pass the third-grade reading guarantee. My own school was evaluated on data points from the 2013-2014 school year to determine if we would be an EdChoice school. Please tell me how data points from 6 years ago are effective at measuring our school and our students currently?!? Imagine being a student and having to feel like if you do not get a certain score that your school would potentially lose funding? There is simply no equity.

The same private schools that receive money from vouchers because of this failed report card measure don't have to report data on K-3 literacy at all. In fact, a study of Ohio's EdChoice program found that participants fared worse on state tests compared to their closely matched peers remaining in public schools. Westerville has the potential to lose hundreds of students

and millions of dollars to private schools that are not rated, have no report card, and may be performing worse than their public counterparts.

I have spent the last 34 years attending, learning, and working in our public schools. I believe in our public school so much that I have dedicated my life's work to educating our students and advocating for Ohio's public schools. I believe that they are the key to our future and the future of our state. Lack of funding impairs our progress and the ability to meet the needs of all students. Please support Senate Bill 89 as passed by the House.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your consideration. I am available to respond to any questions you may have.