



MARBURN
ACADEMY

HB 166 Interested Party Testimony
Jamie Williamson, Marburn Academy
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Co-Chair Bob Cupp and Co-Chair John Patterson
April 8, 2019

Co-Chairman Cupp, Co-Chairman Patterson and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for allowing me to testify today on HB 166 Ohio's biennial budget bill. My name is Jamie Williamson, and I am the Head of School of Marburn Academy in Columbus, Ohio. Marburn Academy is a nonprofit, tuition-based private independent day school for children grades 1st through 12th with learning differences such as dyslexia, ADHD, and executive function issues. I am testifying today regarding the school funding changes the legislature is considering and their potential impacts to the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship and Autism Scholarship as these are important programs for the families and students we serve.

Marburn Academy was founded in 1981 by a group of visionary parents, educators, and civic leaders who saw our community's need for a school that would provide effective instruction for bright students whose learning differences prevented them from succeeding in traditional school programs. During that time, we have provided the means for over 2,800 young people to transform their school experience from failure and defeat to one of success and hope. In addition, tens of thousands of students in other schools have benefited from the training their teachers have received through Marburn's outreach programs. Marburn Academy serves students with average to superior intelligence that have been unable to learn in their previous schools due to difficulties often labeled as learning disabilities from approximately 30 Central Ohio communities and is one of only 14 schools in the United States accredited for its Orton-Gillingham classroom instruction system by the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators.

Marburn Academy is a provider for students receiving both the JPSNS and Autism Scholarships, although most of our scholarship recipients are on JPSNS. Currently, around 96% of our families participate in the scholarship program. Today, the value of the Jon Peterson scholarship is governed by ORC 3310.56 and directs that the *Formula Amount (ORC 3317.02 (F)) + Special Education Category (ORC 3317.013) = JPSNS scholarship value*. As introduced, HB 166 maintains the same "formula amount" as FY19 and the same level of special education category amounts which means the scholarship level for each special education category would remain the same amount as it is today. Of course, we would appreciate this committee evaluating the need for potential increases of these scholarship amounts due to the needs of the families and students we serve, but are grateful at least that the scholarship value remains consistent in the as introduced version of HB 166.

We commend your efforts to improve school funding in our state with the Ohio Fair School Funding plan which is under consideration by this subcommittee. The item our school is most focused on concerns the possible changes to the formula amount and the model in which the Jon Peterson Scholarship is calculated

using a direct line item instead of the current system. If there is a line item funding the scholarships or other changes to how the formula works we are concerned about potential impacts to scholarship funding, special education category amounts and scholarship availability. We urge this committee to bear in mind the vital importance these scholarships have for the student population that we serve. If there are changes to the funding model or structure of these scholarships we want to ensure that the JPSNS and Autism Scholarship values and availability to the students that rely on them are of the same value as they are today or increased and do not go backwards.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this important issue for our school and appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our request. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.