



MICHAEL PECCHIA

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Interested Party Testimony

House Bill 166 (Operating Budget FY 2020 – 2021)

Mike Pecchia, President

Valley Christian Schools

May 29, 2019

Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and Members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Mike Pecchia and I am the President of Valley Christian Schools in Youngstown. On behalf of the students, families, staff, administration and school board I want to thank you for your service and for your continued support of School Choice in Ohio. I also want to thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning concerning House Bill 166.

Valley Christian Schools (formerly Youngstown Christian School) is a K-12 Chartered Non-Public School located within the Youngstown City School District serving nearly 700 students. 90% of our students attend under 1 of the 4 school choice scholarship programs available to their families and nearly 70% are from households qualified as low income.

I am proud that Ohio has one of the most robust school choice programs in the country that attempts to improve the plight of “the least of these” in our education system. I will never forget the tears of joy and relief of a single mother in 2006 when she learned that her 4 children could attend our school under the new Ed Choice Scholarship Program. 12 years later her twin daughters graduated and now attend college under full academic and athletic scholarships.

In addition to providing opportunities for Ohio’s students, participating schools (Scholarship Programs) are a good investment as many have per pupil spending rates lower than most public schools. Valley Christian’s per pupil spending is approximately 65% of the state average.

PLEASANT GROVE CAMPUS NETWORK OFFICES & K-1

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Transportation HB 166 establishes a task force to study transportation of Charter and Non-Public school students. Currently nearly 65% of our students receive transportation from their public districts. We have enjoyed a good working relationship with our local district's transportation department and where reasonable we adjust our school calendar and opening and closing times to theirs. While I fully support efficiencies, any reduction in or loss of transportation is a reduction of school choice. School Choice will all but be eliminated without transportation! I implore you to not cut costs on the backs of our scholarship students.

Ed Choice Scholarship Amounts: Valley Christian School has set tuition rates equal to the scholarship amounts of \$4,650 for K-8 and \$6,000 for High School which were last increased in 2016. Our families are not able to afford tuition, therefore, we have not had any tuition increase in several years. Operating expenses and teacher salaries however do increase annually and we have had to absorb those increases at the expense of student programs and teacher benefits. I would ask consideration for increasing the Ed Choice Scholarship amounts to at least equal what the state funds Charter Schools. In many cases we are serving the same student population, why should Chartered Non-Public Students receive less?

Proof of Residency: The local school districts have the responsibility to determine the eligibility of students for the Ed Choice Scholarships. For proof of residency a utility bill is an allowable document, however our local district does not accept a utility bill with a shut-off notice. The very families that School Choice is targeted to help are low-income families who more likely than not are delinquent in many of their household expenses. It is humiliating to our families when we have to tell them we cannot accept their utility bill because it has a "shut-off" notice. Shut-off notices do not indicate "non-residency".

Including Chartered Non-Public Schools: HB 166 proposes funding for Student Wellness and Success and a grant to support graduate coursework to enable High School teachers to teach CCP classes in their high school. I applaud you for these much needed appropriations and ask that you ensure Chartered Non-Public school students and their qualified teachers are included in these programs. After all they are your students also and have the same needs as students attending their public schools. I am not asking for anything extra, but only to be included as well deserving students and schools.

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In closing I want to assure you that Valley Christian Schools recognize the fiduciary responsibilities and welcome the accountability that comes with being a Scholarship Provider in Ohio. As we tell our families... "we have to earn the right to educate your children every year" and we take that very seriously.

Thank you for allowing me to address you today and I will be happy to try and answer any questions you may have.

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