



AMERICAN FEDERATION  
*for Children*

House Bill 64 Testimony  
Finance & Appropriations – Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee  
March 9, 2015

Alyson Miles  
Deputy Director of Government Affairs  
American Federation for Children

Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips, and members of the committee. My name is Alyson Miles, and I'm the Deputy Director of Government Affairs for the American Federation for Children (AFC). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 64, the Main Operating Budget for FY 2016 and FY 2017.

The American Federation for Children is a national advocacy organization, promoting school choice policies that empower parents to choose the best education program for their children. AFC focuses on advocating for school vouchers, scholarship tax credits, and Education Savings Accounts. We support empowering parents with the ability to choose any educational option that is best suited for their children, whether it is in a traditional public school, community school, private school, or through virtual or blended learning or home-schooling.

Currently, there are 41 private school choice programs serving more than 308,000 students in 20 states, D.C., and Douglas County, CO. These programs are providing opportunities to parents and students to make a choice in their education, whether it's because the child is assigned to a poor-performing school, the child's needs are not being met, or there is an unsafe environment. Throughout these programs, students' lives are being changed for the better. For example, a parent in Arizona was able to enroll her autistic son in a private school through the Arizona Empowerment Scholarship Account. Her son was struggling at his traditional public school, but the Arizona ESA allowed her to enroll him at a school that could better address his needs. According to this mom, he was so happy with his new school that he didn't even want to go home at the end of the school day. Her son "literally cried because he didn't want to leave [his new school]."<sup>i</sup>

A student in Indianapolis left her assigned school because it was unsafe, noting one incident when a student in her second grade class brought a knife to school. She is currently using a voucher through the Indiana Choice Program to attend a local private school and is excelling academically and feels safe.<sup>ii</sup>

A parent of a student benefitting from the EdChoice Scholarship explains "I want my community to understand how EdChoice helps to break the cycle of poverty that plagues the poorer

communities. I believe that education is the key to overcome any boundaries! I didn't want my son falling through the cracks. I needed to make sure my son had a chance at receiving the help that he so desperately needed. EdChoice was the lifeline that saved my son's future."<sup>iii</sup>

Lastly, a parent of a student using a Cleveland Scholarship explains "The Cleveland Scholarship has helped her finish school and have a diploma and now go to college. That is why the Cleveland Scholarship means a lot to me, because it has helped my kids to succeed and be someone in life."<sup>iv</sup>

It is because of these stories and others like it that AFC works to promote these programs and see that quality choice programs are enacted into law. As a national organization, we have state-based staff working with local groups, like School Choice Ohio (SCO), to accomplish our goals.

With SCO, AFC has been engaged in supporting and promoting Ohio's five scholarship programs: the EdChoice Scholarship, the Income-Based Expansion, the Cleveland Scholarship & Tutoring Program, the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship (JPSN), and the Autism Scholarship. House Bill 64 continues support for these programs and proposes significant and needed improvements that I will now highlight. AFC would also like to offer some recommendations for your consideration.

#### EdChoice Scholarship and Cleveland Scholarship & Tutoring Program

The EdChoice Scholarship was created in 2005 to provide students assigned to low-performing schools a scholarship to use toward tuition at a private school participating in the program. Since its enactment, the maximum amounts of the scholarship have remained the same: \$4,250 for students in grades K-8 and \$5,000 for students in grades 9-12. The Cleveland Scholarship & Tutoring Program was created in 1995 and is the second oldest scholarship program in the country. This program is available to any student living in the Cleveland Municipal School District to attend a private school. Current scholarship amounts for this program are \$4,250 for students in grades K-8 and \$5,700 for students in grades 9-12.

When these amounts are not enough to cover the tuition at the school, either the parents (if they do not qualify for low-income status) or the private schools cover the difference. However, this is not a sustainable practice because it is an obstacle to parents being able to choose and will discourage high-performing schools from continuing to be providers. To address this, Governor Kasich proposes increasing the amount of the EdChoice scholarship for grades 9-12 from \$5,000 to \$5,700. This is a step in the right direction for educational choice, and we applaud the governor for including this in the As Introduced bill. However, with the increases in foundation formula amounts to \$5,900 for FY16 and \$6,000 for FY17, we propose increasing the scholarship amounts for all grades and in both the EdChoice program and the Cleveland program to the same amounts. This will give funding parity to all Ohio students.

#### Income-Based Expansion

In 2013, Ohio enacted the EdChoice Income-Based Expansion program to provide scholarships to students who are not eligible for the EdChoice or Cleveland programs and whose family income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. This program is being phased-in over time, with a grade added each school year. This program is currently providing scholarships

for students in Kindergarten and first grade. We support the continued phase-in for this program as proposed by HB 64: second grade will be added in the 2015-2016 school year, and third grade will be added in the 2016-2017 school year. Additionally, HB 64 proposes moving the funding for this program from the lottery profits to the General Revenue Fund (GRF). We support this change as it will provide the program with more sustainability.

Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship and Autism Scholarship

The JPSN Scholarship was created in 2011 and provides scholarships to K-12 students with special needs. These scholarships can be used to attend a private school or to pay for services through a private provider. The scholarship amounts are based on the child’s disability but cannot exceed \$20,000. House Bill 64 includes the following increases to the six categories of special needs funding that are provided as additional aid per special needs student:

Category	Disability	Dollar amount for FY 2015 (from ORC \$3317.013)	Dollar amount for FY 2016	Dollar amount for FY 2017
1	Speech and language disability	\$1,517	\$1,547	\$1,578
2	Specific learning disabled; developmentally disabled; other health-impairment minor; preschool child who is developmentally delayed	\$3,849	\$3,926	\$4,005
3	Hearing disabled; severe behavior disabled	\$9,248	\$9,433	\$9,622
4	Vision impaired; other health-impairment major	\$12,342	\$12,589	\$12,841
5	Orthopedically disabled; multiple disabilities	\$16,715	\$17,049	\$17,390
6	Autistic; traumatic brain injuries; both visually and hearing impaired	\$24,641	\$25,134	\$25,637

*-From the HB 64 As Introduced Bill Analysis by the Legislative Service Commission*

Under these increases, the JPSN Scholarship amounts for categories 1-4 will also increase. However, the scholarship students in Categories 5 and 6 will only receive \$20,000 each because of the program cap, creating a disparity between them and Category 5 and 6 students at traditional districts. For example, a student in Category 5 at a traditional school district will receive a total of \$22,949 (when looking at the additional aid above and the opportunity grant amount of \$5,900). On the other hand, a student receiving a JPSN Scholarship could only receive \$20,000, resulting in a \$2,949 gap.

Similarly, the Autism Scholarship, enacted in 2003, provides students with autism scholarships to attend a private school or provider for services. The amounts of the scholarship vary under the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP), and like the JPSN Scholarship, the maximum amount of an Autism Scholarship is \$20,000. Ideally, there would be no caps on either of these programs, but if a cap remains, AFC recommends increasing the cap of each program to \$27,000. This increase will eliminate the gap in funding for students in Category 5 and significantly decrease the gap for students in Category 6.

Conclusion

House Bill 64 provides important changes to Ohio’s scholarship programs. Educational choice is about having options for a student’s education and ensuring that those options are funded. It is important to empower parents with the opportunities to choose the best type of program for their

children. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 64 and for your hard work for Ohio's students. AFC and I look forward to working with you to strengthen the bill and Ohio's choice programs with the above recommendations. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Contact and Additional Information:

Alyson Miles

Deputy Director of Government Affairs

Email: [amiles@federationforchildren.org](mailto:amiles@federationforchildren.org)

AFC Website: <http://www.federationforchildren.org/>

AFC YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SchoolChoiceWorks>

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.federationforchildren.org/success-stories/>

<sup>ii</sup> Id.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.scohoio.org/home/success-stories/>

<sup>iv</sup> Id.