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79th House District

House Bill 200 Sponsor Testimony
House Education & Career Readiness Committee
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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education & Career Readiness Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 200, the Ohio Opportunity Scholarship Program.

All too often across our state, children are stuck in schools that do not meet their needs but are unable to attend an alternative institution simply because their families cannot pay for the cost of attendance. Programs exist today such as District Open Enrollment, EdChoice Scholarships, and the Cleveland Tutoring and Scholarship Program to assist parents in finding the right fit for their student, but are based on limited geography, a “failing schools model” and a limited income based model.

In order to assist these parents and students, this legislation funds a newly created, income-based opportunity scholarship program for students in Ohio to attend a chartered non-public school of their choice.

The legislation would create a separately funded, income-based, scholarship program to offset the cost of attending a chartered non-public school for families with a combined income of up to 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For reference, for a family of four, the 2015 FPL is \$48,600. Scholarships would range in value with a maximum scholarship of \$5,000 for grades K-8 and \$7,500 for grades 9-12. By basing this scholarship on income, and funding it separately, the bill removes the current “failing schools” model and “district deduct” which have not promoted better schools in our communities.

An estimated 74% of children come from family incomes below 400% of the federal poverty guidelines, the threshold to qualify for the proposed Opportunity scholarship. A total of 1.08 million public regular education students are estimated to be eligible for this program.

By expanding the educational opportunities through this new scholarship for students from low income families, we will ensure that no child in Ohio is stuck in a school that does not effectively prepare them for the future due to inability to pay.

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Committee, thank you again for hearing my testimony. I welcome any questions you may have at this time.