



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF OHIO**

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**League of Women Voters of Ohio  
Testimony on HB200 (Koehler) Opportunity Scholarship Program  
By Joan Platz  
House Education and Career Readiness Committee  
October 10, 2017**

Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee:

The League of Women Voters of Ohio (League) opposes *House Bill 200 (Koehler) Opportunity Scholarship Program*, and all school voucher programs in Ohio.

The bill would replace three of Ohio's five voucher programs and provide public funds for eligible students to attend chartered nonpublic schools through the *Opportunity Scholarship Program*, established in the bill.

The bill also expands access to a school voucher to 74 percent of public education students in the state (1.08 million students); increases the amount of the vouchers for K-8 and high school students; establishes "Education Savings Accounts (ESA)" solely for students participating in the *Opportunity Scholarship Program*; and funds the *Opportunity Scholarship Program* directly from the state's general revenue fund, rather than as a deduction from school district state aid. The potential net annual cost to the State for full participation in this voucher program is estimated by the Legislative Service Commission to be \$1.188 billion.<sup>1</sup>

The League believes that "...a quality public education is essential for a strong, viable, and sustainable democratic society and is a civil right."<sup>2</sup> Public funds should only be spent on public schools, which are accountable and responsive to the public through elected boards of education and comply with standards that ensure a high quality education.<sup>3</sup>

Expanding access to vouchers for students to attend private schools not only diverts limited public funds from strengthening and improving traditional public schools in Ohio, but also diminishes the

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<sup>1</sup> Vitale, Alexandra, "Fiscal Note and Local Impact Statement on SB85," Ohio Legislative Service Commission, at <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/download?key=7005&format=pdf>

<sup>2</sup> League of Women Voters US, Federal Role In Public Education Position at <http://lwv.org/content/federal-role-public-education-position-0>

<sup>3</sup> League of Women Voters of Ohio, "Positions on Social Policy – Primary and Secondary Education," at [http://www.lwvohio.org/assets/attachments/file/Social%20Policy-Primary%20and%20Secondary%20Education\(2\).pdf](http://www.lwvohio.org/assets/attachments/file/Social%20Policy-Primary%20and%20Secondary%20Education(2).pdf)

role that local communities play in teaching children how to participate in our democratic form of government.

The purpose of public education is to prepare youth for continuing education, careers, and to participate as active citizens in a democracy. The school and the community work together in this endeavor. The interests of the community are represented through the voters who elect local boards of education, which govern public schools and are responsive and accountable to the community and the taxpayers, who support the schools. In return for receiving a public education, an educated citizenry contributes to the well being of the entire community.

This important relationship between the community and its public schools is compromised when public funds are diverted to support private education interests.

Private schools have different missions and purposes than public schools. Some private schools are created to preserve a particular religion, culture, or philosophy, which might even be contrary to the beliefs of the majority of the taxpayers in a community.<sup>4</sup>

Private schools can select the students they want to educate, thus increasing segregation and the stratification of the society, and undermining the social stability of a community.<sup>5</sup>

According to the *National Report Card on School Funding*, prepared by the Education Law Center and Rutgers University, Ohio already has a lower public school participation rate than most states (85 percent), and a high degree of economic income disparity (132 percent) between households with children in the public and private school systems.<sup>6</sup>

The public school participation rate is important, because researchers have found that “...the proportion of students enrolled in public schools affects the level of financial support necessary for public education.” Poverty becomes concentrated and more resources are needed when fewer students from wealthy households attend public schools. In addition, public schools also lose political power when a large percent of families opt out of public education.<sup>7</sup>

Proponents of public funding for private schools say that students and parents need more educational choices to meet student needs. But the Ohio Constitution doesn’t guarantee parents “school choice.” Instead, state officials have the constitutional responsibility under Article 6.02 to secure a

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<sup>4</sup> See attached examples of mission statements from private schools in Ohio.

<sup>5</sup> Bush, Bill, “White students disproportionately use Ohio school voucher program,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, August 27, 2016 at <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2016/08/28/white-students-disproportionately-use-ohio-school-voucher-program.html>

<sup>6</sup> Baker, Bruce; Danielle Farrie, Monete Johnson, Theresa Luhm, and David G. Sciarra, “Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card,” Education Law Center and Rutgers Graduate School of Education, January 25, 2017, p. 9 and 10 at <http://www.schoolfundingfairness.org>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

“thorough and efficient system of common schools in Ohio.”<sup>8</sup> Although the Ohio Supreme Court has declared Ohio’s system of funding schools unconstitutional four times, instead of fixing Ohio’s school funding system, state officials have promoted “school choice,” as a policy objective, and have diverted public resources to private schools, including over \$414 million in 2015-16 alone.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the percentage of revenue raised locally to support K-12 education has increased under Governor Kasich’s administration, increasing the local property tax burden on Ohio’s taxpayers. According to an *Innovation Ohio* report, in 2010-11 state aid as a percent of K-12 funding in Ohio was over 50 percent, but by 2015-16 the state share for funding schools had dropped to about 48 percent, and the local share of school spending had increased to close to 52 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Twenty years after the first DeRolph Supreme Court decision was issued, the State is no closer to reducing reliance on property taxes to fund schools as directed by the court.

Just imagine if that \$414 million directed to private schools last year had been used to raise the quality of educational opportunities for students in Ohio’s traditional public schools. Think about providing students with more access to smaller classrooms, early childhood education programs, school libraries, school nurses, counselors, advanced courses, the arts, and world languages to ensure that students have access to a complete curriculum and comprehensive services to support learning.

The LWVO urges state officials to fulfill their constitutional responsibility to establish a “thorough and efficient system of common schools” rather than diverting limited public resources to support private schools. We respectfully ask that all of Ohio’s voucher programs be phased-out, and public resources be focused on Ohio’s public schools, and their mission to prepare our next generation of citizens.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

*The League of Women Voters of Ohio, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

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<sup>8</sup> Article VI.02 School Funds at <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/laws/ohio-constitution/section?const=6.02>

<sup>9</sup> Sparling, Hannah, and Jessie Balmert, Private schools’ \$400 million public check, March 8, 2017 at <http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/politics/2017/03/08/private-schools-400m-public-check/97659884/>

<sup>10</sup> Dyer, Stephen, “IO on the Budget: Education Funding Preview,” January 26, 2017 at <http://innovationohio.org/2017/01/26/io-on-the-budget-education-funding-preview/> and Dyer, Stephen, “Innovation Ohio: On the Budget: “Five Questions About Kasich’s School Funding Proposal,” Innovation Ohio, February 6, 2017 at <http://innovationohio.org/2017/02/06/five-questions-about-kasichs-school-funding-proposal/>

## **Examples of Mission Statements from Nonpublic Chartered Schools in Ohio**

### **1) Harvest Preparatory School (HPS)**

**4595 Gender Road**

**Canal Winchester, OH**

<https://www.harvestprep.org/pages/2-about-hps>

#### **“About HPS**

Founded in 1986, Harvest Preparatory School (HPS) was started in an effort to build a Christ-centered educational system in the Columbus, Ohio area. Harvest Preparatory School’s purpose is to increase students’ educational opportunities through a standard of excellence, a Christian commitment and a passion for success.

Now in its 28th year, HPS trains children in a distinctive, Christian, private education. Harvest Prep develops a diverse student body academically, spiritually, emotionally, morally, socially and physically through the power of God and our highly trained and Spirit-filled faculty and staff.

We train each student in a full range of academics, including the core courses of language, literature, writing, math (through Calculus), science (through Chemistry & Physics), and history as well as the enrichment studies of foreign languages (Spanish & Latin), music art, and drama. In addition, we have programs for some special needs students.

Achieving academic excellence and athletic prowess are important aspects of education for your child and Harvest Preparatory School offers your child both. But by far the most important part of a student’s education at HPS is our emphasis on maintaining a Christ-centered atmosphere.

Our Christian emphasis and chapel services alone set Harvest Prep apart from many other schools. All of our curricula are Christ-centered and are presented with a Christian worldview through scripture integration, devotions, weekly chapels and Bible courses. Our student body is made up of over 70 different area churches and we encourage each student to be involved at their home church.

We are very proud of our 145,000 square feet of facilities, which is located on 84 acres of land on the east side of Columbus. Our students are able to utilize these facilities which allow for quality classrooms and labs, after school activities, a state-of-the-art gymnasium with four full-sized basketball courts and a pro-turf football and soccer field and all-weather track, just to name a few!

It is our desire to educate students who will make a positive difference in their world and seek excellence in our academic and extracurricular programs.”

### **2) Fairfield Christian Academy**

**1965 N. Columbus St.**

**Lancaster, OH 43130**

<http://www.fcaknights.org/MissionVision.aspx>

### **“MISSION STATEMENT**

Fairfield Christian Academy partners with parents to educate and minister with excellence to the whole child: spiritually, academically, emotionally, physically, and socially in a Christian community of faith.

### **VISION STATEMENT**

Fairfield Christian Academy equips preschool through 12th grade students with a Biblical world view in concert with an excellent college preparatory foundation to impact their world as passionate, competent ambassadors for Christ.”

### **3) Columbus Academy**

**4300 Cherry Bottom Road**

**Gahanna, OH 43230**

<https://www.columbusacademy.org/page/Page/About-Academy/Welcome/Mission--Standards>

### **“Statement on Diversity and Inclusion**

Columbus Academy believes that diversity, inclusion, equity and justice are essential to the excellence of our community, culture and curriculum. We recognize that the pursuit of this excellence requires thoughtful, deliberate and sustained action and that this effort is critical to our educational mission.

Community: We value diversity in all of its dimensions including but not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical abilities, family composition and socio-economic status. We seek to reflect multiple perspectives, backgrounds and interests in all facets of our community. We recognize that students who are exposed to and embrace diversity are better prepared to engage in a pluralistic world.

Culture and Climate: We strive to be an inclusive community in which each individual feels safe, respected and valued. In building a community that values similarities and differences among its constituents, we seek to embody in our actions and in our relations with one another the principles of equity and justice as well as Columbus Academy’s core values of honesty, respect, compassion, responsibility and fairness.

Curriculum: We believe that exposure to multiple – and even sometimes competing – points of view best equips students to explore, understand and apply complex concepts, building the basis for a rigorous education. By weaving diversity into the fabric of our curriculum, we equip our students with the interpersonal and critical thinking skills that are essential to success in the complex, multicultural world in which we live.

Columbus Academy adheres to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS ) Principles of Good Practice for Equity and Justice.

### **Standards**

In order to implement the broad understandings of the Mission Statement, the school has adopted a set of standards which seeks to further the purposes and objectives inherent in our program.

To develop in each student the competence and desire for further education.

To foster students’ keen appreciation of the interdependence of people and cultures as part of preparation for a

world where the only constant will be change.

To present a curriculum which embraces diversity and provides students with the opportunity to know, appreciate and evaluate the contributions of all people whatever their race, gender, creed, religion, sexual orientation or national origin.

To give students a knowledge of the fundamentals of mathematics, science, technology and critical thinking as they prepare for the challenges of the future.

To extend and to enrich students' aesthetic judgment and discrimination through their active involvement in the humanities and in the creative and performing arts.

To foster and nurture in each student a strong sense of self based upon intellectual, social, athletic, personal growth and development, and the school's recognition of these achievements.

To involve all students in the process of moral development by developing their sense of others, by discussing issues of social justice and by encouraging their service to others.

To encourage a sense of individual and social responsibility in students by asking for the highest integrity in decision-making.

To promote the benefits of positive role-modeling by older students for younger members of the school community.

To promote students' understanding and respect for physical fitness, team work and good sportsmanship.

To encourage involvement in the extracurricular offerings of the school, for students and faculty, in keeping with the philosophy of developing the whole person.

To sustain a thorough and thoughtful college preparatory program that prepares students for access to and success in appropriate institutions of higher learning.

To review and evaluate all aspects of the school's program with an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the developmental needs of each age group of students.

To insist on the highest standard of professionalism by the adults in the school as they interact with peers and students.

To create a close relationship between the school, its alumni and parents and the community at large that supports young people as they seek to discover and develop the full range of their potential."

#### **4) Ohio District Lutheran Schools**

**P.O. Box 38277 Olmsted Falls, OH 44138**

<http://oh.lcms.org/schools/welcome-to-lutheran-schools>

"Welcome To Lutheran Schools

The Good Lord has blessed our Ohio District with Lutheran schools that understand what it means to partner with parents in the education of their children. Our 60+ schools and early childhood centers are all unique. However, we are united in our mission to serve families as we work together to not only provide outstanding academics across our curriculum but also a positive Christian environment where students can excel and most importantly grow in their relationship with Christ."

#### **5) Diocese of Columbus**

**Office of Catholic Schools**

**197 E. Gay St.**

**Columbus, OH 43215**

## “Mission Statement

We are called to serve the Catholic community in the shared ministry of education, through mission, academic excellence, leadership, governance, financial viability, and advocacy, to form disciples who live fully the message of Jesus Christ.

## Philosophy of Catholic Schools

Schools represent a vital part of any society and are a major source by which the wisdom and culture of a people are passed to new generations. Catholic schools reflect the importance of integrating the Catholic faith with the educational process; therefore, the Church sponsors and supports schools as the major vehicle for pursuing its teaching ministry.

In order for the Church to carry out the goals of this ministry, the Catholic bishops of the United States have established principles which serve as the foundation from which Catholic education flows and which our schools are committed to pursue:

- Communicating the Gospel message of Jesus
- Building and modeling a community of faith
- Orienting students to the obligation and experience of service
- Providing students with the opportunity for growth through worship

Though Catholic theology recognizes parents as being primarily responsible for the education of their children, achievement of these principles is shared by faculty members, the parish, and the Diocese.

The hallmarks of Catholic schooling are Catholic identity and Catholic culture. Catholic identity is clear and easy to maintain. We identify things through our senses. We see the crucifix or statue, we hear the bells, we taste the Body of Christ through the Eucharist, and we smell the incense. Maintaining a Catholic Culture takes time and intentionality. A culture that exists with people and processes that track the Gospel message, provides time for worship, and is based on service is what makes Catholic schools different. It is being intentional about this difference that helps to form the students into disciples and builders of the Kingdom here on earth which is the goal of Catholic schooling.

The Catholic schools of the Diocese of Columbus are also committed to creating and maintaining an academic climate which provides students the best opportunity to become productive, contributing citizens of their world. Equally important, the schools are sensitive to the uniqueness of each student and foster the giftedness of the individual.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the schools of the Diocese are expanding their vision to include education which develops productive citizens of a global society responding appropriately to differences among people and meeting the challenges of the technological age.”

### **6) Columbus Torah Academy**

**181 Noe Bixby Road**

**Columbus, OH 43213**

<http://www.torahacademy.org/about/see-the-winning-videos/test/>

“The mission of the Columbus Torah Academy is to develop our students into educated, contributing, active, aware members of contemporary American and Jewish societies. To accomplish this mission, CTA is dedicated to:

- Provide a broad based, high quality, secular education, designed to impart the critical educational and learning skills that are necessary to meet the students’ future educational and/or vocational challenges. A college-preparatory curriculum is offered with learning center support.
- Provide a strong, comprehensive Jewish education, within a modern Orthodox Zionist framework, to inspire

learning, living and growing in Judaism as a life-long commitment. Our goals are for our students to make Torah values the center of their lives and to instill in them an attachment to and a sense of responsibility for the State of Israel and the Jewish People.

- Provide an atmosphere within the school that is respectful of and sensitive to the diversity that exists within the community and our parent body through the modeling and teaching of derech erez (proper respect) and middot (moral behavior).

- Provide every Jewish child in the Central Ohio area with the opportunity of a CTA education, within the limits of our educational and financial resources.”

### **7) Hebrew Academy of Cleveland**

**1860 South Taylor Road**

**Cleveland Heights, OH 44118**

[http://www.hac1.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=686271&type=d&pREC\\_ID=1126545](http://www.hac1.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=686271&type=d&pREC_ID=1126545)

“For seven decades, the Academy’s mission has been to imbue students with a love of G-d, Torah and Eretz Yisrael and to prepare them to achieve excellence in Torah and general knowledge based on successful cooperation among family, Judaic and General Studies faculty and community.

The Academy’s comprehensive curriculum is designed to meet the various needs of the student body and has set national standards. The focus of our award-winning faculty goes beyond teaching the curriculum to teaching the whole child. Character development, community service, inter-generational and enrichment programs are indispensable components of the Academy experience. They reinforce the school’s mission and serve to ignite the minds and inspire the hearts of our youth.”