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Proponent/HB 200
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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you for allowing me to share my story with you today.

My name is Aleecia Johnson. I'm in tenth grade at Louisville Public High School, and I'm here today asking you to support House Bill 200. When you think of this bill, I want you to think of me. My life represents this bill perfectly because students like me would have options that I don't have today.

I have attended public school for my whole life. My family lives in the house that my Grandma was born in, which puts me in a good scoring district. The district isn't a good fit for me though.

When I was young, my school fit me fine. My Mom was president of the elementary PTO, and I participated in lots of sports and after school activities. Things started changing as I got older and my school no longer fits me.

Two years ago, my father left after being married for 20 years to my Mom. Suddenly my sister, two brothers and I were feeling completely lost. A few months after my dad left my sister moved out. She was my best friend and I felt like my whole life had been turned upside down.

My brothers and I had grown closer together and I was very thankful for that, but not the school situation we were in. My little brother was being bullied in school and I can remember him coming to me and crying about the kids being mean to him at school and how he didn't want to go back.

In those short months my life had been completely changed. I had grown to the person I am today and became more mature about life and how I handle situations I am put through. I started to see that my current school wasn't giving me the fullest opportunities that I deserve.

During this time, the teachers at my school decided to go on strike for nearly a month, and it was very hard for me to go to a school where I didn't know who would be in my classroom trying to teach me and my schoolmates.

The public school I attend now is not very culturally diverse; we actually have only about 2% diversity rate. My school has a reputation for being stuck up. I want to learn about other people, and other cultures. This lack of diversity is not preparing me well for the real world I'm going to enter.

It feels like everyone at my school has a label and if you're not rich enough or wearing the right clothes you will be looked down on. You will be treated different than the other kids.

I would like to attend a different school that better fits where I am in life now. I would like to attend a different school that better fits where I am in life now. I would like to attend a school that is more welcoming, and where the students and staff know me as a person.

But, I don't have any choices because my mom works two jobs and we struggle to financially keep up. I want to go to a school that isn't as all about the clothes you wear or who you're friends with. I need a school that is able to know more about me than just my name. On top of the changes in my family over the past years, I have fought several health problems, and had to be taken to the hospital more than once. None of my teachers know about what I've been through, and I don't feel like they care. In a school with about 900 students, if your grades are fine, and you aren't getting into trouble, you are pretty invisible.

Over the summer, I worked hard at a job, went to TOPUCU Leadership training, and qualified for a full-ride scholarship to a private school for one year. I could use my work money for uniforms. But my Mother and I knew that even at a greatly discounted rate, we would never be able to afford any tuition in future years. After paying the mortgage, bills, and getting groceries (sometimes from a food pantry) there is no room for anything extra. Because so many families need help, the school couldn't guarantee my entire high school would be free, and my Mom didn't want me to have a great experience for one year, and then switch back, hopping between schools every year. So, I couldn't go to the private school, despite their offer.

Since we can't afford private schools, I asked my Mom to attend a different public school, but she is afraid that the open districts in our area have more violence, and don't score as well academically as the public school I attend now. The safer and better academic districts don't have open enrollment.

The truth is that there are no options for students like me. My district is fine academically, but isn't right for me. I am more of a person than just a report card or a number. No student should be subscribed to a district only because of their address. My family can't move. We fit the financial qualifications of the current EdChoice Scholarship, but because someone set age limits that don't make sense, I'm too old to be allowed school choice.

Please pass this bill. Please see my face when you vote, knowing that you will be giving me, and students like me, access to a whole new world of opportunity. Thank you again for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.