

Richard C. Smith
Marysville Exempted Village School District – Board Member/Legislative Liaison
Testimony – House Education and Career Readiness Committee
May 22, 2018

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. I am Richard Smith, Marysville Exempted Village School District School Board Member. I come in opposition to HB 200.

I want to begin by thanking this committee for efforts on behalf of children and educational improvement in Ohio. I appreciate members taking time to listen to my testimony today. I want you to know that my positions are shared by the other members of our school board. As the elected leaders of our local public school, our role is to ensure that every child in our community has the opportunity for a world class education. We expect our schools and our district to be not only a choice but the best choice for parents who consider other options for their children's education. We believe that the Legislative responsibility is to provide an excellent system of common, public schools. Until that goal is achieved, diverting resources and focus toward other educational options is not appropriate. We urge you to help foster choice within the public system as we continue to move toward meeting the educational needs of all children.

The Ohio General Assembly has consistently opposed open ended, undefined spending on education and all other fiscal areas of government responsibility. Additionally, the Legislature has focused on policies that target financial assistance to the neediest and vulnerable citizens in our State and avoided financial benefits to those with adequate financial resources. Substitute HB 200 fails to meet both of these standards.

First, Substitute HB 200 would replace three current voucher programs which are limited in scope and cost with a single, state wide voucher/scholarship program. This program would initially provide 60,000 vouchers and install a provision which would create automatic increases of 10% per year based on the number of student applications. As written, HB 200 will require the Legislature to accept the funding of a tuition program that has no cap, no ceiling to stop the automatic increases in cost.

Second, the three eliminated voucher programs were established for and limited to students living in school districts that were underperforming. The new proposal opens up eligibility to students across all of Ohio based on an economic criterion with no regard to the academic performance of the district in which they live. Under Substitute HB 200, a family living in one of the most successful school districts in Ohio, whose income is above the median income in the State would qualify for a voucher or vouchers for their children.

I have talked with both the Sponsor, Representative Kyle Koehler, and my own district representative, Representative Dorothy Pelanda. Both mentioned in our conversations how HB 200 would not increase spending nor would reduce the formula funding for schools. I must respectfully disagree. Substitute HB 200 would create a new wedge in the pie of State funding. Unless the pie gets bigger, and there are questions about that possibility, any new wedges creates downward pressure on the previous existing pieces of the pie. If this Bill passes, the money to fund it has to come from somewhere. The Ohio Legislative Services Commission wrote:

Overall, we estimate the net increase in state costs of providing 60,000 scholarships to be \$48.0 million annually after taking into account the reduction in state foundation aid and subtracting FY 2017 funding levels for direct state payments for income-based EdChoice scholarships and Cleveland scholarships, which are no longer necessary under the bill.

This money has to come from some place. I can't believe that cuts will be made to other state funding programs and the current funding level maintained for schools. I believe that passage of Substitute HB 200 will further a shift from state tax dollars to greater reliance on local property tax dollars to provide education to Ohio's children.

I will close by saying that the Ohio Constitution states that, "The General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state." I urge you to fulfill this requirement before using tax dollars for other purposes. Remember, 90% of Ohio's children attend public schools. As many of you may have said or thought, these children are our future. Please seek ways to improve their educational options within our public schools.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Smith
Marysville Exempted Village School District Board Member