



Catholic Conference of Ohio

Larry Keough/Associate Director/Education
Senate Education Committee
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Proponent Testimony/SB 85

I. Introduction

Good afternoon Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes and Committee members. My name is Larry Keough. I am the associate director in education at the Catholic Conference of Ohio and advocate on behalf of 376 Catholic schools enrolling more than 118,000 students.

II Background

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Catholic Conference of Ohio have championed parental choice in education for decades. That support is predicated upon the Catechism of the Catholic Church that expressly states:

“As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental.”

Parental choice enables parents to be the first and foremost educators of their children.

It should not be surprising that Catholic schools are well represented as providers in school-choice programs.

*95 percent of Cleveland scholarships students are enrolled in Catholic schools;

*67 percent of the traditional EdChoice scholarship students are enrolled in Catholic schools;

*52 percent of Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship students are enrolled in Catholic schools;

52 percent of EdChoice Expansion Program students are enrolled in Catholic schools.

Suffice to say, our participation in school-choice programs has availed Catholic and non-Catholic children a Catholic school education that they otherwise would not receive.

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State-sponsored scholarships have empowered working poor and middle –income families by alleviating the financial burden on them to select the schools of their choice.

In many respects, our participation in choice programs is an extension of our mission to reach out to the poor, vulnerable and students who did not get off to a good start educationally.

The true measure of education is not simply enrolling the best and brightest. The real challenge in education is to make a difference in the lives of children who are at-risk and/or may have mild, moderate or severe disabilities.

III. School Choice Movement in Ohio

If the year was 1995 and the General Assembly was attempting to favorably pass Ohio's first school-choice program, then SB 85 – Ohio's Opportunity Scholarship Program – would probably be ahead of its time.

But SB 85 is before this committee after 22 years of school-choice incrementalism. Ohio leads the nation with five school choice programs:

- *Cleveland Scholarship Program;
- *Traditional EdChoice Scholarship Program;
- *Autism Scholarship Program;
- *Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program;
- *EdChoice Expansion Program.

And, over the past two plus decades, school-choice has become as diverse as the students who are served with the advent of tax credits, Education Savings Accounts and universal-type programs.

Ohio's five school choice programs and the voucher expansion in other states have laid the ground work for SB 85.

Its time has arrived!

Sen.Huffman's new school version of parental choice legislation is addressing old school concerns. For years, representatives of public schools have complained that programs such as traditional EdChoice are funded on the backs of public school students through a per pupil deduct.

SB 85, is funded from a line item in the budget in lieu of extracting dollars from districts through a per-pupil deduction.

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SB 85 also addresses an age-old problem of inconsistencies from one program to another that include but are not limited to requirements for providers, amounts of scholarship and student requirements.

By consolidating the Cleveland Scholarship Program, traditional EdChoice and EdChoice Expansion, SB 85 provides transparency and consistency in scholarship amounts, requirements, accountability, and a source of funding.

We are pleased that the scholarship amounts, set at \$5,000 for students in grades K-8, and \$7,500 for students in grades 9-12, would help make it palatable for schools to continue to participate in school choice, especially at the high school level.

We believe SB 85 is the next step in Ohio's school choice movement and in doing so, will provide new found opportunities for families to exercise their parental-choice rights.

IV. Conclusion

We ask for your favorable support for SB 85. At this time, I would be pleased to answer any questions.