



Proponent Testimony on HB 166 Finance – Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee

I want to thank, Chair Lou Terhar, and the Committee members, for the opportunity to share with you my thoughts on an amendment in HB 166.

My name is Ann Riddle and I am the Executive Director of the Northwest Ohio Scholarship Fund. I felt it was necessary to come to you in support of eligibility for 8th graders to apply for their 9th grade year for EdChoice, regardless of what school they attend in 8th grade. If they are assigned to an EdChoice high school, they can apply for an EdChoice scholarship to attend a chartered non-public high school.

The Northwest Ohio Scholarship Fund is a privately funded organization that awards need-based scholarships for students who reside in 19 counties in NW Ohio to use to attend private schools for kindergarten through the 8th grade. The scholarships are partial and families are required to pay a minimum of \$500 a year towards their family's tuition. Families must be at the 270% or below the federal poverty level. Once a family is awarded a scholarship they can re-qualify through the 8th grade for their child and add siblings if they have a child in the program.

The mission of the program is that all children, regardless of their economic circumstances, deserve access to quality educational opportunities and parents should have opportunity to choose the best school for their children.

NOSF has awarded over 15,000 scholarships worth \$13 million since 1999. This year NOSF awarded 730 need-based scholarships for students to attend 72 different private school including 105 8th graders graduating from the NOSF program. Of the 105 graduates, 55 of them are assigned to an EdChoice Designated Public School but they are not eligible to receive an EdChoice voucher as it stands today.

Their parents have struggled and saved to be able to send them to a private school and provide for them an education that best meets their needs. These students were not eligible for EdChoice at the time they enrolled in grade school. For many of them, it has been a huge sacrifice. Now that they are graduating from the 8th grade, the thought of private high school tuition is scary and yet they want to continue on a successful path.

I have been with the NOSF program for 15 years and have had the wonderful opportunity to meet many of the parents of these students. Many of them are hard-working parents – some are grandparents and other relatives that are now raising their family's children. They want these

children to be successful in school. They pay the same taxes as their neighbors but because they chose a private school they are penalized with high tuition bills. Forty nine of them are in the Toledo City District where all the high schools received an overall grade of either a “D” or “F” and because of this, they would not receive a quality option. These students need and deserve a quality education, regardless of where they went to grade school. In order to qualify for EdChoice as it is now, they have to enter a failing school for one year to be eligible while their neighbors, who have been attending any public school, are eligible.

I ask you that you give the same opportunity for these 8th graders and other 8th graders living in a designated public school district in Ohio the chance to apply for an EdChoice scholarship for high school. I would be happy to answer your questions about the NOSF program and thank you again for giving me the occasion to speak to you about EdChoice eligibility for 8th grade students.