



Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
Sub. H.B. 166 Testimony  
May 29, 2019

**Testimony of Dr. Frank O'Linn, Secretary for Education and Superintendent of Schools,  
Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.**

Good morning Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee. I am the Superintendent for the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, which serves over 40,000 students in 110 schools throughout 8 counties. We applaud the provisions in the budget bill to support “student wellness and success” targeted to the most disadvantaged children in district public schools. We are concerned, however, about issues impacting other of Ohio’s most disadvantaged students. I am here to discuss recommended enhancements to the Cleveland Scholarship Program.

Currently there are 314 otherwise qualified students attending Catholic or Lutheran schools who enrolled in time for this year, but were unable to obtain a Cleveland scholarship. That is exactly 314 that we know of, because the schools themselves are shouldering the full cost of providing these parents’ school choice. We estimate at least 100 more who expressed interest but did not follow up when vouchers were unavailable, and an unknown number who did not attempt without a summer application window.

The injustice is that currently the Cleveland Scholarship is not out of funding. Last year, with \$44 million appropriated for this year<sup>1</sup>, the ODE made allocations of just over \$38 million based on April 2018 applications. Even after usual earmarks to tutoring and program operation, more than \$2 million should have remained, yet there was no summer application last July. As Ohio’s first scholarship program, it has no administrative rules to specify a threshold for the application window. Thus the year will end with dollars unspent, despite hundreds of students seeking school choice.

The provision to require a second window for the Cleveland scholarship is an important measure intended to prevent this situation. When we realize who is most likely to be changing schools in summer, it is the neediest students, those most housing insecure, who are most affected by this situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips, J. et al (2017, September). Greenbook LSC Analysis of Enacted Budget: Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/documents/budget/132/MainOperating/greenbook/EDU.PDF>

Catholic schools, which educate about 85% of Cleveland voucher recipients, serve a diverse population. Over 73% of our elementary students qualify as economically disadvantaged (qualifying for Federal free or reduced lunch program), greater than 70% of elementary students are racial minorities, and 3.5% are English language Learners. Many are not Catholic, but they choose the schools for their strong, positive culture and education rooted in Christian values.

Now in its 22nd year, the program continues to be, fundamentally, about social justice. Ohio has always had school choice: anyone who considers local public schools a factor when choosing a home already makes this type of choice. The Cleveland scholarship program was created to provide options to those who lack the means to choose.

We cheer on our neighbors like Solon which once again tops Ohio's public school rankings, but we cannot ignore its median home value that is double the Ohio average<sup>2</sup>, making Solon and places like it highly exclusive. Ohio's Fordham Institute dubbed these "[America's Private Public Schools](#)<sup>3</sup>," publicly funded, yes, but nowhere within reach of Cleveland residents, with median household incomes around \$28,900, barely over half of the statewide number. However, numerous National Blue Ribbon recipients are providers for the Cleveland Scholarship, making top-quality options attainable for those who choose.

School choice places power where it belongs: in the hands of parents. All scholarship students participate in state testing, with results published online. Such power provides the most immediate and uncompromising form of accountability: parents are informed consumers, and dissatisfied customers exit, along with their funding.

I ask you to support the provision for increased funding for the Cleveland scholarship appropriation, which was reduced in the last biennial budget despite steady participation, both to enable students to access choice, and to support schools in sustaining it.

Nonpublic schools provide tremendous value to taxpayers. While Cleveland public schools spend over \$17,000 per pupil, of which instructional expenses make up \$9,661,<sup>4</sup> the 7,438 Cleveland vouchers for grades K-12 average just \$5,134 per pupil.

Despite its efficiencies, urban Catholic schools are straining under the costs of educating students in poverty. Catholic schools provide over \$5.4 million in philanthropic support to close the gap to educate their more than 4300 elementary students on the Cleveland scholarship. The gap is greater in high schools, where true costs for the 13 Catholic providers average \$15,507 per pupil.<sup>5</sup> We suggest raising voucher maximums to \$6,000 for elementary or \$7,500 for

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<sup>2</sup> Solon Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.solonohio.org/DocumentCenter/View/764/Statistics?bidId=>.

<sup>3</sup> Petrilli, M.J. & Scull, J. (2010). *America's private public schools*. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute: Columbus, OH.

<sup>4</sup> 2018 District Profile Reports (Cupp Report). Ohio Department of Education. <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Finance-and-Funding/School-Payment-Reports/District-Profile-Reports>.

<sup>5</sup> 2018-19 Standard School Survey. Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.

secondary tuition, closer to the true cost of education, while still providing substantial taxpayer savings.

While achieving strong academic growth, our Catholic schools emphasize that cycles of poverty are broken not just with test scores. It is in building communities on values – developing generations of strong families who love God and love one another – that Catholic schools create a brighter future. Longitudinal evidence is clear that Catholic schools produce lifelong learners who are more civically engaged, including more likely to vote, more tolerant of diverse views, and more committed to service as adults<sup>6</sup>.

In closing, Catholic schools provide a valuable public good to Ohio. School choice is not the enemy of public schools; rather, it is one component of “public education,” the wider ideal of preparing all students for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>7</sup> I ask your support of the Cleveland Scholarship to continue to provide efficient savings for the state and power to all eligible parents to choose among traditional public, magnet, and charter options, or nonpublic, especially Catholic schools, which are indispensable to Ohio’s future.

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<sup>6</sup> Campbell, D.E. (2001). Bowling together: Private schools, public ends. *EducationNext*, 1(3). Retrieved from <https://www.educationnext.org/bowling-together/>.

<sup>7</sup> About the State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://education.ohio.gov/State-Board/State-Board-of-Education-Home>.