

Written Testimony Regarding H.B. 110
May 4, 2021

Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding H.B. 110.

My name is Holly Martens, and I am the Director of Finance and Administration at St. Ursula Academy in Toledo. St. Ursula Academy is a 6-12th-grade all-girls Academy. I am here today testifying on behalf of the school, our 181 students who are currently on EdChoice, and the many students who strongly wished to attend St. Ursula but were not able to do so because they did not have the opportunity for School Choice.

Before I get started, I would like to thank all of you who support the state scholarship programs. Although I am here to discuss EdChoice, all the state scholarships have allowed numerous families the ability to help provide their child/children with the educational resources that best meets their needs, something they would not have been able to before these scholarships were implemented.

As the Director of Finance for our school, I witness daily the struggle families go through as they decide on the proper school that fits their child's needs. Before a family decides on St. Ursula, students shadow other students, students come for high school visitation days, families come for open house and parent information sessions—all to ensure St. Ursula will provide their daughter with the best education possible. Like careers and religion, school is not a 'one size fits all' situation. People know when purchasing a house that the school district they live in may not be the best fit for their child. Schools know this, too. So, they accept students from other districts during an open enrollment period. It also holds true that not all the children in Ohio could fit into the current public school system. Therefore, it is up to our state government to help provide taxpayers with other options; the state scholarship program affords individuals this option.

So, why should more taxpayers not have this option? Why should all taxpayers not be able to take a portion of their tax dollars and spend it on their child's education where they choose? The Senate and House seemed to agree on this matter over the past couple years and opened the EdChoice scholarship to several families who were not eligible in the past, but for the 2021-2022 school year, the situation has changed and the scholarship has moved in the wrong direction. Many families were dumbfounded at our March 2 registration night when the new EdChoice criteria was released, taking it away from areas that had previously had it. This change has left approximately 15 students/families not knowing if they will receive EdChoice next year, so they therefore do not know where their daughters will be attending school in four short months.

The cost to educate a student at St. Ursula is approximately \$13,300; currently, a little more than 75 percent of our student body is receiving financial assistance from the school to meet this cost. The cost to educate seems to be growing through the years. The cost of education is increasing each year, primarily because of the wages and benefits offered to the faculty and staff. Private schools struggle to keep teachers from year to year because we cannot offer the wage and benefit packages provided by public schools. This issue is never discussed, though, when other schools say the scholarship program is hurting their school.

The EdChoice Scholarship amounts of \$4,650 and \$6,000 have remained the same for several years now, and although it is a generous amount, a large financial burden is still placed on the family and the school to close the financial gap between the scholarship and the cost to educate.

I do not look at this scholarship as hurting public schools. I look at it as holding them accountable. For the first time in years, the EdChoice scholarship was challenged by public schools because it started to have a negative impact on their budget. Instead of just saying the scholarship hurt them, how many schools evaluated what took place within their four walls or questioned why so many families were leaving their school? St. Ursula does so every time a student leaves. We evaluate why she is leaving, always wondering what needs were not being met. We see if we can make changes internally to make sure it does not happen again. This high standard is what we hold ourselves to every day!

The positive impact EdChoice has had on the students who are fortunate enough to meet the criteria to receive it is long-lasting. For many families, our cost to educate exceeds their budget, but the college preparatory school fits their daughter's needs. The State of Ohio needs to continue to allow families to have School Choice. Students should have options to ensure they receive the education to help them grow and meet their goals and aspirations. Taxpayers dollars should be able to follow these students.

As you review my testimony, please reconsider expanding the EdChoice criteria for the 2021-2022 school year to include the families with students transitioning to 9th grade who are currently in private schools. Also please consider the amount of tax dollars families are paying to the state of Ohio and allow those tax dollars to increase the scholarship amount annually, a scholarship amount that has remained stagnant for the past several years.