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Testimony to the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
HB11

Good afternoon, Chair Representative Bird, Vice Chair Representative Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Representative Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. Thank you for hearing testimony today, and thank you, Representative McClain and Representative John, and co-sponsors of the Establish the Backpack Scholarship Program Bill.

I stand before you as a proud graduate of a public high school and three state universities in Ohio. I also stand before you as an accomplished educator who has worked for three decades in public education as a high school teacher, a full-time college professor, and as an Ohio Department of Education curriculum consultant.

I'm a past president of the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, a recipient of an Ohio Governor's Award for Teaching Excellence, a school district's teacher of the year, and I was honored to be named as a Martha Holden Jennings Master Teacher of Ohio.

I give all glory to God for allowing me to succeed in his name, and I share just a few of my accomplishments to provide context and credentials for my testimony. You might be wondering: What on earth is this teacher doing here today? Does she understand why we're here? With passion, I say, "yes."

I believe in public education, but I'd like to give you three reasons why you must give every family the freedom to choose schools that are best for their needs.

First: Schools in affluent districts do not always maximize capacity for all learners. Assumptions that kids from suburban neighborhoods don't need to have choice are erroneous, reckless, and wrong. To illustrate, let me share details about my children's school system.

Olentangy Local School District, Ohio's 4th largest school system, receives a five star rating. We can celebrate the excellence but should also study all the quantitative data. Olentangy Berlin High School students have underperformed in Algebra I and in American government. Likewise, Olentangy Orange High School students scored below expectations in American history. Language arts progress is down across the entire school district.

My daughter is a special education student who maintains a 3.7 GPA. However, she, along with most of her Algebra I class, failed the Ohio graduation test in 2021. Since then, she and her peers received no additional math tutoring, and the special ed department is working with overwhelming caseloads. My daughter will retake the Algebra I test next month, and she has experienced emotional stress and damage to her self-esteem because of the lack of support she and her teachers have received.

A dive into the data for my daughter's previous schools reveals that at Walnut Creek elementary, where she began her learning journey, the subgroup growth score for special education students in math last year was -3.2. At Berkshire Middle, students performed below expectations in 7th grade math, and special ed students failed to meet growth expectations in that building as well.

When it comes to our youngest and brightest learners, Olentangy failed to meet the metrics for Gifted Identification and Services at ten elementary schools. We can only imagine the impact on these learners and how missed opportunities in gifted services will ultimately affect their trajectory and intellectual growth.

Second: Students should have the right to attend schools that honor their sincerely held religious beliefs.

During 7th grade, my daughter's teacher handed her a young adult novel that included a chapter describing the chemistry of an orgasm. She was 12 years old. At my daughter's high school, signs on school facilities are still marked male and female, but district officials allow transgender students to move freely in restrooms, locker rooms, and bunks at band camp—without informing parents and students. Meanwhile, my son and daughter have been asked to provide their pronouns on classroom surveys, and some Orange High students chose not to take an English course because the classroom walls are completely covered with transgender flags and activist symbols. Sexual identity “ally” bulletin boards in Olentangy's middle and high school hallways include definitions of transexual and pansexual lifestyles, among others.

As Christians, my husband and I are raising our kids to be kind, respectful young adults. However, that is not enough in my kids' district, where their 1st Amendment rights are being trampled, and they are expected to affirm and celebrate topics which contradict our Biblically rooted beliefs. We would like to send our kids to a school where students unite and celebrate their shared learning goals, not a school system where gender, racial, and sexual identity are most emphasized. This causes distractions, and even depression, for some students who feel coerced to comply with the district's ideological agendas.

This leads me to my third point: Cost and Competition. Research shows that public schools are more responsive and effective when they face competition. In the suburbs, we're told that if we're unhappy, we should leave. Unfortunately, our \$15,000 tax bill makes it nearly impossible for us afford tuition for another school. When I hear public educators warning that kids will leave and that schools will lose money, the first thing I ask them is “Why would families *want* to leave, and what can the district do better to keep them there?” Wouldn't competition serve as a catalyst for change and improvement?

In the end, we must ask: Are we investing in systems that aren't reaching every learner, or do we want our finances to follow our kids, meet their learning needs, and fuel their future dreams?

I don't know about you, but as a public educator, I believe in our land of liberty. Please support HB11 for our learners, our dreamers, our strugglers, and our achievers. Give them freedom to fly to schools that best serve their individual needs. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions.

*Arrowhead, Alum Creek, Freedom Trail, Glen Oak, Heritage, Johnny Cake Corners, Liberty Tree, Oak Creek, Olentangy Meadows, and Tyler Run