

March 9, 2023

## HB-11 Education Committee Testimony

Submitted by: Raymond C. Kochis, Superintendent at Cincinnati Christian Schools

Good afternoon, Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and House Primary and Secondary Education Committee members. My name is Ray Kochis, and I am honored to serve as the superintendent of Cincinnati Christian Schools in Fairfield, Ohio. We are a school of 645 students from preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Thank you for permitting me to testify today in support of HB-11.

Our school is 51 years old, and we celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a gala last year. It was a wonderful experience recognizing ten individuals who committed over 25 years of service to our school.

Graduates and former parents shared their memories of the impact that specific faculty and staff members had on them and how our school helped to shape, develop and grow them into the person they are today.

Little did I realize our gala's impact on those working the event. One gentleman, I will call Robbie, a musician in the jazz band, found me afterward and said that he sat at his table and wept as he listened to the testimonies of graduates and former parents. Robbie's son does not qualify for the EdChoice scholarship (the low-income or designated school list), but he has the financial resources to pay for our school, and his son is enrolled as a freshman this year.

Conversely, I will call her Susan, the event center manager where we held our gala, who was equally as moved by the impact our school has

had on the individuals who spoke. She, too, wanted to enroll her daughter at our school. She went through the entire enrollment process. Susan and her daughter were a perfect fit with our school's mission. However, Susan's daughter does not qualify for either of the EdChoice scholarships, as her household income is above the Federal poverty threshold, and her family resides in one of the more prominent school districts in our area. Susan applied for financial aid, but unfortunately, the amount we could provide was insufficient. She tearfully notified my Director of Admissions that they could not afford our school.

Our high school tuition for next year will be \$11,800.00. The average price of private school education in Southwest Ohio is \$15,156.00 or \$12,211.00 if you factor out the schools with a tuition of more than \$20,000. Either way, CCS's tuition is less than the average private school tuition. Even though we provide over \$373,000 in financial aid and scholarships to qualifying families, we could not make a CCS education attainable for Susan's daughter.

There are many more stories of individuals who desire to attend our school because CCS is the right fit. Our school meets their family's educational needs, but they fall in the middle. They land in that space between the low-income threshold for families and not attending a school on the ODE's designated school list. For this reason, I am a strong advocate for a move to universal school choice that allows parents to choose a school that is the best fit for them. In Susan's case and countless others, HB-11 would have made all the difference for them.

My school has benefited from the various scholarship programs the State of Ohio affords, as those scholarships have helped foster and grow diversity at CCS. We view diversity as more than just a person's skin color. Diversity is the wide range of characteristics and attributes that make our school unique. Currently, 32% of our students are racially

diverse, up from 24% when we conducted our ADM (average daily matriculation) in 2015. Our student body is represented by at least 15 nations and six primary languages. In 2015, we had 20 students benefit from the EdChoice Scholarship and six from the Jon Peterson Scholarship. Today, 231 students attend CCS on the EdChoice Scholarship, of which 136 are low-income, and 37 utilize the Jon Peterson Scholarship. Because of our commitment to the socio-economic diversity at CCS, we write off approximately \$540,000 for families who receive the EdChoice low-income scholarship.

Our school's racial, academic, cultural, and economic diversity makes CCS unique, unlike most other schools in our area. HB-11 will afford more mission-similar families like Susan, who fall between the low-income and designated school list, to come to schools like CCS that meet their families' needs and aligns with their values.

Thank you for your time and consideration in making school choice available for all families in our great state, not just for those who fall below the economic threshold or because they happen to live in a school district on the designated list. The Backpack Bill is the best option of school choice for all Ohioans.

Respectfully,  
Raymond C. Kochis  
Superintendent at Cincinnati Christian Schools.