

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and Honorable Members of the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 11, also known as the Backpack Bill.

My name is Joshua Bowling and I live in Hamilton, Ohio. I am expressing my support of the Backpack Bill today.

In October of 2019 my 3 children attended public school elementary. There was an incident at my children's school that made my wife and I very uncomfortable and feared for the safety and welfare of our children. We discussed the issue with family and friends and concluded that safety of our children was not a priority in the district. After having several meetings at the school with the principal, and assistant superintendent it was made clear that I was no longer welcome to be inside the school. This prompted my wife and children to sit down and discuss our future plan for education. Our children loved the school and the teachers, but it was not sustainable. We needed options for them to receive the education they needed and deserved. After a few sleepless nights and hours of prayer we chose online home schooling.

Once enrolled we started to experience certain struggles that come along with not having in class learning. My children would email questions to teachers and would wait for hours for a response. This was not the fault of the teachers in my opinion it's just how the format dictates. This would leave many assignments open and pending till late in the evening. Sometimes as late as midnight before they were able to submit completed work. My children were in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> grades at the time and the stress of staying up until midnight then trying to get a full night's sleep was not a healthy balance.

Prior to online school my children were active in school choir, and intermural sports at the elementary. These extra circular activities were no longer an option for them. With the cost of private signing lessons and select sports programs it was not financially feasible for our family. Leaving my children with sports and arts that rounded out their school experiences.

I first learned about the Ohio Ed choice program from family and friends in the spring of 2020. We were reluctant to pursue it as an option as we were not sure we would qualify for the voucher. It was also nerve-wracking thinking putting our children in another school program in less than a year. Our children had always been academically successful and fully invested in learning. This changed in March of 2020 we noticed they were just turning in assignments with no retention of the material or desire to discuss what they were learning. At this point we decided to pursue the Ed choice program. We reached out to Cincinnati Christian Schools and set up a meeting with their administrator Peggy Head. She explained the whole process in great detail and how to apply with the State, and that's exactly what we did.

In July 2020 we received the letters for all 3 children stating they had received an Ed Choice scholarship. We were elated and terrified all at the exact same time as we would be switching from public to private school. We believed prayers were answered and the safety of our children would no longer be a great concern as we left them to learn every morning. With

smaller class sizes and better teacher to student ratios we felt our children could return to loving their learning environment.

Since arriving at CCS all three children have been on the honor roll maintaining 3.7 GPA or higher. They have returned to sports playing soccer, volleyball, basketball, and running track. They have all rejoined the choir, and in the fall 2 will be in honors choir. This spring my youngest will join the other 2 in National Junior Honor Society Berean Chapter. Ed choice has changed the entirety of my children's academic and athletic careers. To say it mildly my children's lives have been permanently changed for the better.

In closing we are aware that the voucher has a dollar amount assigned to it, but the value is truly immeasurable for my family. The opportunities provided by this program to so many families at CCS and in other schools will have a cascading effect in this state. The landscape of future leaders here in Ohio and abroad will be forever impacted by those who received a chance at a better educational experience.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Backpack Bill. I urge you to vote yes on this legislation and would be happy to answer any questions.