

To: Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

Re: HB 11 "The Backpack Bill  
Proponent Written-Only Testimony

From: Jason Guilliams, 444 Colt Circle, Bellville, OH 44813  
Councilman / Finance & Human Resources Committee Chair, Village of Bellville  
President, Mansfield Christian School Board  
Vice Chairman, State Farm Federal PAC State Advisory Committee  
Board Chairman (2013-2020), Buckeye Imagination Museum

Date: March 13, 2023

Dear Honorable Chairman Bird, Vice Chairwoman Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Committee:

I am Jason Guilliams and I am asking you to vote to amend the budget bill and insert HB 11, commonly known as The Backpack Bill.

Serving others is a foundational tenet of our family and is demonstrated, in part, through my work in various elected and appointed facets of our community and throughout our state. My wife, Tricia, and I have been married for 21 years after meeting at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. Tricia is a graduate of Mansfield Christian School and I am graduate of Lexington Local School District. Incredible sacrifices were made by my in-laws because they were prohibited from receiving educational funds they paid into through taxes because of their choice of education.

Tricia and I were married 10 years before we were able to have our first child. This was after years of extensive and expensive infertility and genetic testing. Tricia is a carrier of a X-linked deadly genetic defect that impacts boys depending on which X chromosome is passed at conception. Imagine our relief and gratitude when we received the news that Jackson did not carry the defective X chromosome. We were elated at receiving this miracle! Throughout the 10 years of miscarriages, disappointments, discouragement, and trusting God had a plan in place to grow our family, we became increasingly burdened for the orphaned and knew that adoption would become a part of our journey too. Fast forward 5 years after Jackson was born...We had endured countless mounds of paperwork and home studies, and a costly failed adoption; all contributing to the increasing cost of growing our family. Then the day came that we had been longing for...our baby girl was born. We rushed down to Florida, signed necessary papers, and walked into the NICU to find our sweet daughter attached to monitors and tubes as part of the treatment for Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome. Throughout the grueling 18 days in NICU, we knew adoption was the right decision and we would never take Emmy's life for granted, committing to advocate for what is best for our children...always! Thinking our family was complete, we received an unexpected call when Emmy was 7 months old. An adoption plan was dissolving and there was a boy that would be born in 8 week who needed a family. He, too, would require treatment for Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome. With a 5 year old and a 9 month old, we rushed down to Florida, again. We arrived with the need to encourage the birthmother to adhere to her cesarian appointment to best protect her and the baby. After some delays, our fierce fighter, Tobin, was born. Thankfully, he only required a weeklong stay in NICU for Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome treatment. The road to

growing our family was costly and we believe it was worth every penny. To best meet the needs of our children, both known and unknown, Tricia chose to stay at home with our children...another financial sacrifice. We have been blessed financially in many ways, but we did not enter parenthood with large sums of cash sitting in bank accounts. We intentionally make it a priority to give back to our community and around the world financially and serving our community with our time, while still doing our best to protect the needs of what is best for our family.

When our children began to reach school age, we knew we had a decision to make. Our local public school district was in the middle of building a new state-of-the-art elementary building and had a strong history of academic success. Plus the school district was getting a substantial portion of our property taxes, a 1% income tax, and benefited from our State of Ohio income taxes. One might think the decision would be obvious as to why we should just enroll our children in the public-school option. However, our approach to education was the same as other decisions we made as parents, and in the best interest of our children...not their zip code, not what was convenient, not what was less of a financial burden...simply what we believed was in the best interest of our children given their unique skill, abilities, and needs. We chose to enroll in our academically and spiritually excellent education option, Mansfield Christian School. But, this came, again, at a significant cost. Now with all 3 of our children enrolled, the cost burden continues to increase even though we are providing a substantial amount of money toward education through tax dollars already.

Public school options are, and continue to be, the right option for many students across our state. However, many schools, including our rural local public school, are dealing with issues occurring in classrooms that don't belong. Instead of banning these items, I am asking that you empower families to choose what is right for our families. Families should not have to incur greater sacrifices due to our convictions. Values matter and should be left to the parent's choice.

The current monopoly of one size fits all is not working for Ohio! Our kids are falling behind year after year. Families need options to use their education tax dollars that are best suited for the needs of their children.

As a resident, taxpayer, and constituent, the decisions you make affect my children, my family, and my community. I am asking you, again, to allow our taxpayer money already allocated toward education to be used at the parent's discretion with appropriate controls in place. Allow the people of the Great State of Ohio to demonstrate innovation in education excellence by voting to amend the budget by inserting HB 11.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 11. I appreciate your consideration of my perspective as a parent, school board member, and elected official in Ohio.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Guilliams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jason Guilliams