



The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

House Bill 11: Opposition Testimony
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Tuesday, April 25, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Scott DiMauro. I am a high school government teacher from Worthington, and currently serve as President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of the 120,000 members of OEA, thank you for the opportunity to offer opposition testimony on House Bill 11.

OEA is opposed to the expansion of Ohio's existing voucher programs or the creation of new ones. HB 11 would create a new, universal voucher program. Under the bill, all K-12 students would be eligible for a state-funded voucher to pay for private school tuition or homeschooling regardless of the household income of the family or the quality of their local public schools.

Approximately 90% of Ohio's students attend public schools. OEA strongly believes that the state should prioritize funding to support these students. The enormous price tag associated with HB 11 should make this proposal a non-starter. The LSC Fiscal Note for the bill demonstrates a cost of over \$1.1 billion a year. This is simply to provide voucher costs for current private school students (both chartered and nonchartered nonpublic schools), homeschool students, and recipients of the Jon Peterson and autism voucher programs as they are dually eligible under the bill. Again, that is well over a billion dollars in additional state funds annually to pay for the private school tuition or homeschooling for those who have already chosen those options. This would blow a massive hole in the state budget. The opportunity cost of this is that it would greatly hamper the ability of the state to fully implement the Fair School Funding Plan and support the vast majority of Ohio's students.

Parents have the ability to choose the right educational environment for their students. Options include their home public school, open enrollment options, charter school options and a number of existing voucher programs. Under current law, the EdChoice voucher program sets income eligibility at 250% of poverty (\$75,000 for a family of four). This is already substantially higher than the income levels for other assistance programs such as Medicaid or free or reduced priced school meals. Under the Governor's proposed budget, income eligibility would increase to 400% of poverty (\$120,000 for a family of four). There is no need to institute a universal voucher program and provide private school tuition for families with six-figure incomes at the expense of meeting the needs of our public school students.



HB 11 would provide \$5,500 for K-8 students and \$7,500 for high school students. Any student in Ohio would be eligible as long as they choose not to attend a public school. Based on total formula funding for fiscal year 2023, 276 school districts receive less than \$5,500 per pupil funding from the state. For these districts, the state will spend more money for students who take the voucher. Universal vouchers are an especially a bad idea for Ohio's rural communities where there are few private school options.

Aside from the financial arguments there are other glaring shortcomings with HB 11. One is the potential for discrimination. Proponents of the bill have talked about the need for choice. But whose choice? Private schools can pick and choose their students. Students can be denied enrollment because of academics, behavior, space limitations, disability, gender, religion, the "right fit", or for no reason at all. This is in stark contrast to our public schools which are tuition free and open to all students within the district.

Another problem with HB 11 is the lack of accountability. There is already an uneven playing field in terms of academic and fiscal accountability between public schools and private schools that accept vouchers. HB 11 would extend taxpayer funds to pay tuition to nonchartered non public schools (which are not eligible to participate in the current EdChoice program) as well as for homeschooling. There is minimal state regulation for these options. News reports from earlier this year about racist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi, and homophobic lessons being shared through a homeschooling network should serve as a warning about this lack of oversight.

In conclusion, I urge this committee to reject House Bill 11. The creation of a universal voucher program would have disastrous implications for the state budget and the ability of lawmakers to make good on the promise to fully and fairly fund Ohio's public schools—the choice of 90% of Ohio's students. HB 11 would drain resources from these students in order to fund the private school education of students who are already enrolled in private school. Ultimately, HB 11 puts the desires of the few over the needs of the many.

Chair Bird, this concludes my testimony. I stand ready to answer questions from the committee.