

Witness statement of

Edward T. Gareau

On

H. B. No. 11

Mr. Chaiman and members of the primary and secondary education committee my name is Edward Gareau and I would like to thank you for allowing me to testify before this committee. Before I continue, I hope that the members will excuse my nervous disposition as I am not used to public speaking. I would like to start by explaining my personal experiences with publicly funded parochial private and charter schools. My career began as a field technician in 1994 for a very large communications public utility. My kids tell me that my career began back in the days of the crank telephone and two cans connected by string. Through out my career my job took me to many places including many schools. When I would work in a charter school, I could not help but notice the chaos that was going on. Kids would be roaming all over the place and very little learning would be going on. When I went to work in a private nonprofit parochial school, I noticed a completely different environment. There was not any chaos and the kids were getting a good education.

In 2002 I met my wife and we were married in 2004. We have been blessed with four wonderful children. Our three youngest children are on the autism spectrum but all a closer to what was once called the Aspergers end of the scale. They are all very intelligent but have issues with behavior and socialization. When our children began to attend school my wife and I were faced with a dilemma as to what type of school to send them to. We knew that they all were eligible for public tax dollar funding through the Peterson scholarship program. We looked at charter schools but because of my own experience and the fact that most of them are run by for profit management companies we decided against them. In the end we decided to send two of our children to private parochial schools that use the Peterson scholarship. We did this because we felt that those schools could best meet their educational needs. Our sons Chris and Eddie now attend Saint Edward's High School in Lakewood, Ohio. Chris is a sophomore and the Eddie is a junior and both receive the Peterson scholarship. Up until recently everything at Saint Edward's was fine. Our sons were getting their needs met and Saint Edward's was and still is receiving good funding from the state. We recently noticed that things at Saint Edward's began to change especially for our son Chris.

In January there started to be a shortage of on of the medications that Chris takes daily. Chris normally takes a medication call Adderall XR and we were not able to get it. This medication helps Chris Vyvanse but this had the opposite effect on Chirs and made things worse. Chris had outbursts in class. Saint Edward's had no issues with him. In fact, at his IEP meeting in January we asked how things were going and they said, "fine." After his issues started because of the medication shortage we started getting phone calls from Saint Edward's. Instead of asking how they could help us they started saying, "Saint Edward's is not equipped to handle kids like Chris and he may not be able to return next year." We kept telling the school that the medication shortage was not the fault of Christopher and that we needed time to work this out. Time for his medication to come back on market or time to find a new medication that would work. We even offered to keep Chirs at home and have him do his school work there until a solution could be found. The school would do this for a kid who had serious medical issues then why not Chris? All we kept hearing is that Saint Edwards is not equipped to handle kids like Chris. Unfortunately, we were notified on Friday by Saint Edward's administrator for children with special needs that it would be recommended that Chirs not return for next school year.

Now you're probably wondering what does this have to do with H. B. No. 11 and bills and budget issues related to public funding for charter and parochial private schools? I am very concerned that schools like Saint Edward's have seen where bills like H. B. 11 and vouchers are going. I am also very concerned that these schools may decide to get rid of kids like Chris because they will still be able to get

tax dollar funding with out the hassle of having to deal with special needs children. I am also very concerned that Saint Edward's will eventually find a way to get rid of my son Eddie in the future.

In my life I am proud of three things, my marriage, my family, and my service to our country in the middle east. Sadly, though I now believe that the country I defended and my brothers died for no longer exists. In the country that I defended all children would have the same opportunities and the same standards for any school that receives tax dollars. Finally, I would like to say that if public tax dollars are going to be used to fund education in charter or private parochial schools then the standards must be held to the level as in public schools. I urge this committee vote against H.B. 11, fix the school funding issues as outlined by the Ohio State Supreme Court, and make the standards the same for all schools receiving public tax money. Otherwise, discrimination will prevail against special needs children like my own.