

Testimony on House Bill 11
House Primary & Secondary Education Committee

Submitted by:
Deborah Cooper

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 11.

I am an Ohio resident, a voter, and a former educator who has taught at all grade levels from kindergarten through 12th grade, as both a full-time and a substitute teacher in both public and private schools. I have raised three sons, all of whom attended public schools, and two of my grandchildren currently attend public schools in Ohio.

While I believe parents should be able to choose how they wish to educate their children, they should not expect taxpayers to fund private school education. A robust *public* education system is absolutely essential for any sort of democracy to work. We badly need informed citizens who can think critically. We also badly need accountability in education, which is present in public school districts, but sadly lacking in many private, charter, and homeschools. We've already endured the ECOT scandal. How many families have fallen victim to greedy and corrupt people who have lied while lining their own pockets? And do we really want to allow a robust Nazi homeschool network to continue to flourish unimpeded?

Ohio Legislative Service Commission (LSC) estimates that House Bill 11 will cost the state up to \$1,056,000,000 in fiscal years 2024 and 2025, meaning that there will be \$1.1 billion less for public school districts. 90,500 students who attend private school via private tuition would become eligible for vouchers. LSC estimates 10,000 additional public school students not now eligible for vouchers would take advantage of the expanded voucher eligibility. HB11 would increase homeschooling tax credits from \$250 to \$2000. LSC's estimated tax loss to the state for homeschooling is in the range of \$45 million each year of the FY24/FY25 biennium. And, with little accountability, how many parents might claim they are homeschooling their children and simply pocket the extra taxpayer money without educating their children?

After 26 years, our state STILL has not seen fit to develop a constitutional school funding plan. If this proposed voucher plan is passed, public districts will suffer. Further, if the HB 1 "flat tax" also passes, then whatever money might be more fairly allocated to public schools across the state through the Fair School Funding Plan will "leave by the back door."

Rather than having ONE taxpayer-funded public education system, which is mandated by Ohio's constitution, we would, in effect, have three taxpayer-funded educational systems (public, private, and home schools), only one of which (the public system) would provide meaningful oversight. Currently, public school systems are responsible for educating ALL children, including those who require more resources or present major challenges. If private schools benefit from taxpayer funding, will they also be required to accept all students?

While on the surface, providing money directly to parents for their children's education might sound fair, but arguments for vouchers are flawed.

For example, where's the evidence that School Choice saves taxpayers money? The universal

voucher bill would create a new bureaucracy in the Ohio Treasurer's office that must include a file for every student, costing taxpayers millions. Is it reasonable to think that providing tax refunds for more than 100,000 students and writing checks to homeschooling parents won't be very costly?

When money is siphoned away from public schools through a voucher program and (if HB 1 passes) a "flat tax," then communities will have to keep running levy campaigns to keep their public schools open. Even well-to-do communities will struggle to pass levies; what about poorer communities? If the goal is to destroy public education and force students into a private system, who will be responsible for educating ALL Ohio students? What about rural communities, where public schools are often the hub of social activity, and where private school options are scarce?

In business, perhaps the idea that competition breeds excellence might be a reasonable assumption. In public education, not so much. ECOT drew many unsuspecting parents in with promises of excellence and good value, but without accountability, ECOT was able to falsify records and fleece families. ECOT still owes Ohio \$17 million. How many more ECOTs will crop up in Ohio to bilk families?

The argument that parents cannot influence public schools is also false. Parents have access to school administrators in public schools, as well as the opportunity to elect board members and to be heard in public board meetings. Is this also true of private schools? Where's the evidence?

We must provide a CONSTITUTIONAL public education system that serves ALL Ohioans equitably.

Please consider carefully the consequences of passing the "backpack" bill.

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