

Opposition Testimony – HB 11
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
April 22, 2023
Presented by Susan Kaeser, Education Specialist League of Women Voters Ohio
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Chairman Bird, Vice Chairman Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, my name is Susie Kaeser. I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts and the views of the LWVO about HB 11. I live in Cleveland Heights, where my adult children were educated in our public schools and where I have been a classroom volunteer and kindergarten tutor at my local elementary school for more than 30 years. For the last three years I have served as an education specialist for the League of Women Voters Ohio.

We have great kids and our system of public education has unique strengths that express our commitment to the equal value of every person and the essential role of education to democracy. We all benefit from educated citizens who are capable of self-governance. I believe HB11 abandons these key principles that have successfully guided the public investment in education since it was established in the 1853 Constitution.

Our education tradition makes room for individuals to seek another path than the public system. But the public system is funded with public dollars because of its critical role in serving the common good. It acknowledges that we are responsible for one another, and benefit from working together in common purpose. Public schools are public. They are:

- Open to all.
- Available everywhere.
- Accountable and responsive to the public through the elected board of education, open meetings, and referendums.
- Guided by regulations that protect rights and ensure quality.
- Inclusive of diverse views and individual differences.
- Public spaces for the community and a resource for building community.
- Places where, as philosopher Benjamin Barber observed, “children learn to be the public.”

HB 11 supports education that is different. It does not have these essential qualities that serve the public interest and the common good. It uses public funds to promote choice and individual preferences without accountability to the public. It lacks safeguards for students and for the taxpayers who are funding as many definitions of education as there are nonpublic education providers.

The open checkbook approach to education spending represents a reckless disregard for education quality, and for making sure that public funds are well-spent. The public deserves better.

The bill puts private choice in competition for scarce state funds with public education, the system that the Constitution requires, that serves the majority, and serves democracy.

It completely disregards any concern for using public funds to achieve a “thorough and efficient” system of education. Underwriting thousands of individual students is a far cry from efficient.

HB 11 legitimates and funds unregulated and unaccountable education which lacks safeguards for students and the public.

This new vehicle:

- Transforms education policy from a focus on education quality to a financial subsidy, and denigrates the state’s role in education to a financial relationship between families and the Treasurer;
- Expands the work of the State Treasurer and grows the state bureaucracy that must now process applications and administer funds but has limited capacity to track the use of public money. Running the program is expansive. And it lacks sufficient safeguards to prevent fraud and misuse of public funds.
- The magnitude seems unmanageable. More than 169,000 students who now attend chartered private schools, 47,000 home schooled youth and an uncounted number of students who attend non-chartered non-public schools would be eligible. Potentially 1.6 million public school students could participate. It’s a lot different than 610 public school districts.
- Removes all limits on who can educate our youth and what is taught at public expense. It prohibits any regulation of curriculum and extends public funds to non-chartered nonpublic schools, schools that operate outside of any public oversight because of their religious purposes.
- Gives to the education provider decision making about who has access to education funds and to what end.
- Ignores the need for public funds to serve the common good.
- Abandons the Legislature’s expressed concern that education prepares youth for the workforce and the economy. The lack of oversight means schools can teach anything.

We urge you to reject HB 11. It will weaken the public system. It lacks any oversight for how public funds are used. Quality is not a concern in this bill. It makes choice more important than ensuring that our youth experience an education that benefits all of us.

It establishes a terrible precedent for what we expect education to achieve and the role of public funds in advancing our society.

LWVO opposes HB11: it weakens the public system for which the legislature is responsible; disregards the public purposes of education; and fails to protect the rights of students or of the taxpayer who are paying for an education that does not have as its goal to strengthen our communities, economy and democracy.