

Testimony in Support of HB339 (135th GA)
Keith Hamblen

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and distinguished members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, **thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 339.**

My name is Keith Hamblen. I serve as the Pastor of Calvary Bible Church and Superintendent of its school the Lima Christian Academy. I also serve as the Executive Director of the Buckeye Christian School Organization (BCSO), a group of eighteen nonchartered, nonpublic schools established in 1985. I have represented the nonchartered schools in Ohio on the Ohio Department of Education's Superintendent's Non-Public Superintendent's Advisory Council (NPA) since that council's inception under then State Superintendent Ted Sanders (1991-1995). On that council, I have spoken on behalf of all the nonchartered schools and not just the ones in our BCSO organization. The other members of the NPA are all chartered schools.

Our nonchartered schools have worked well together for years with the Department of Education (now DEW), the Board of Education, and members of the General Assembly, and members of these bodies know me and will support that claim. Our schools are able to be chartered by the state, but they have continued to be nonchartered because of the belief that this position best reflects the proper relationship between education and the state. People whose children attend nonchartered schools and the people operating nonchartered schools typically are not in higher income brackets; there are exceptions, but they choose to have their children enrolled in schools that believe in this "separation of church and state" enough to sacrifice to continue in it, even with significant financial strain. I agree with those who say that it is appropriate for education dollars to go where it is in the best interest of the child, and believe that parents have the primary responsibility to make this determination.

I heard Representative Click's sponsor testimony, and he addressed the issue of accountability. I would add to his listing of ways in which these schools are accountable my role (and that of other BCSO administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders) in visiting these schools, knowing their leadership, watching the students perform academically, socially, and in their communities, and I can testify to the quality of these programs, maintained for years in many cases.

Not only have these schools provided the personal and smaller-setting attention needed by many in our communities, but these schools also have a proven track record of academic quality. HB339 would fill the hole existing in providing universal school choice in our state. Please support HB339.

Thank you,
Keith Hamblen
February 13, 2024