

Testimony in favor of HB 339
Autumn Swanson

Chair 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 stand before you today and advocate for House Bill 339.

I am here today as a mother of 3 daughters, 2, who have graduated and gone on to college and the third who is in the 6th grade at a non chartered, non public school (NCNP). From my time as a parent I have had the pleasure of taking many advantages for them such as public school education, parochial school education with the benefit of an ed-choice voucher, and now my child is in a NCNP for which I pay tuition.

How did we get here, you ask? Well, it's all about my 12-year-old and her education. You see, my youngest daughter has faced some educational challenges that have affected her mentally and emotionally. What you must know is she has been diagnosed with ADHD, which I was not surprised by at all; I was also diagnosed with hyperactivity in the early 80's. Back then they put the parent on medicine and said the child would grow out of it; "just cut out sugar".

We received that diagnosis when she was in the second grade. My daughter was in our city's public school at the time which apparently had no dedicated services for her. "She should probably be on medicine to control her behaviors", was the recommendation. I was told, "there are too many children in my class to give her the attention she requires, she can control herself and has the capacity to do so". I can agree with that, but what is your responsibility to her learning? I had so many questions and no answers.

As a parent, that is devastating. I want my child to succeed, I do not want her on medicine, I want her prepared for the future. For years my daughter suffered from barely getting by with all her report cards reflecting D's and F's, every parent teacher conference I was reminded to look into medication with no other solutions offered. My child was failing and floundering and still being promoted year after year.

I knew there had to be something done and it wasn't going to happen through the system she was currently in. I am not a wealthy person, so it was a hard road, but I had to make some sacrifices so my child could have the best opportunity at a quality, morally centered education. I then enrolled her in a NCNP school. The school is small and holds fast to faith, tradition, and morals.

My daughter was able to start there this year once I figured out how to pay the tuition, as there is no assistance available like the ed-choice voucher to attend a NCNP. I understood her success is more important than my pocket. Today, after just starting this school year, my child has seen such a drastic change in her progress. She went from D's and F's on her last report card from fifth grade at the public school (which promoted her with almost all F's on her report

card) to A's and B's. There has been such a dramatic shift in her learning and her behaviors, and she never went back on the medication.

I am here today because I have experienced all the benefits the state education system has to offer. I am grateful for the variety and choice that we have but I found a serious discrepancy with how my tax dollars are being utilized for education. I pay taxes but my child receives no benefit from that, I also pay tuition and then do not qualify for the tax credit, so how am I supposed to support my choice for my child's education? Especially, if my money is not going where she is most successful. Rather, I see my funds being routed to the places that would have allowed my child to fail. How does that seem right? How am I a single mother, who works everyday going to see a benefit from my state when it comes to my child's education? What makes it so hard to support all parents in the state for their child's education? I have so many questions and no answers.

I came here today to stand for my child and her education. It is already hard to keep our kids on the right path, why force me to make decisions about my child's education because of my inability to pay, when if I was afforded a tax credit, or if my tax dollars were rerouted to the school she attends, I would have not problems making the best decisions to support her education. I feel I have been placed between a rock and a hard place.

I urge each and every one of you to extend the educational savings program to parents of non-chartered non-public schools. The education these students receive at the NCNP schools could turn out to be life changing as it has for my child.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

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