

Testimony in favor of HB 339

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 advocate for House Bill 339.

To understand my position on this matter, you must first know of our children's struggles with mental health. You see for my family, the choice of attending a NCNP school was a necessity.

Our teens are children with a traumatic past. Our children were adopted through foster care and are working through the experiences they endured with their birth family. A past that exposed them to domestic violence, drug addiction numerous negative encounters with law enforcement and ultimately the death of their birth mother due to an overdose. Their birth father is a repeat offender and an addict. Our children are under the care of multiple mental health professionals and have been for some time now. The services that these professionals provide are vital but require additional support both inside and outside of the home.

Once our teens entered middle school, they began to struggle with the immense amount of peer and societal pressures that come with that age. So much so that they began acting out by getting involved with drugs, alcohol, vaping, and promiscuity. As these behaviors escalated and our children began having issues with the law, it was clear that something in their environment needed to change. We enrolled our daughter in an online school to see if that would provide the needed relief. Unfortunately, that left her feeling isolated and alone which caused the behavior to increase. Our son was on the verge of being expelled from our local public school, so obviously putting her back there was not going to help and our son needed a solution as well. (keep in mind that during this time we were working with school officials and the school counselor)

After much consideration and financial planning, we decided to enroll them in a NCNP school that is about 25 minutes away from our home. We enlisted the help of other family members to transport our children daily to and from school. We knew the financial strain that would accompany such a move, but our children's mental and physical health would be worth any sacrifices that we had to make.

Since attending the NCNP school, we have seen our children make great strides in their behaviors. The small class sizes, individualized attention and team support they receive have had a positive and encouraging effect on our children. They still struggle due to their trauma, but the risky behaviors have disappeared. They are participating in school activities and making healthy connections with their peers. The support that we as parents receive has been unprecedented. The staff at their NCNP school have provided such uplifting and encouraging communications that we have hope for our children's futures.

We live in rural Ohio and work full-time. I am a customer service representative, and my husband is a machinist. We are hard-working Ohioans that support our public schools. The fact is that our public and online school systems are simply unable to support our children in the way they need. We have only found that through our small NCNP school option.

The passing of HB 339 would provide much needed relief to families like ours. The questions that I would like you to ponder are these. Why should unique families like ours not be eligible to receive assistance for our children's education like families that benefit from HB 33? Our children will graduate using the same set of parameters as public and chartered schools. Do our children not deserve to be educated in an environment that is beneficial to their mental health and special needs?

Some may say "Well, you choose this" and in a way, we did. However, our children's special needs dictated the necessity of this school choice. We did not make the change because we don't believe in or support public schooling. We made the change based on the needs of our children. For these reasons, I urge support for HB 339.

Thank you for your consideration,

Le Ann Tyson
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