

Melissa Vance
2212 State Route 39 NW
Dover, OH 44622
mrvance49@gmail.com

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Dear Members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

I am writing today to respectfully ask the committee to pass HB 339 out of the committee and into the House for consideration by the full body.

My request is based on my personal experience with both public and non-chartered, non-public (NCNP) schools in the state of Ohio, where I have always lived.

I started my education in a private Christian school for years kindergarten through second grade. I was enrolled in a public school, along with my siblings, from third grade on when my parents could no longer afford private school tuition.

My experience in both schools was very positive and I received a well-rounded education that allowed me the opportunity to pursue higher education. Following high school, I went on to obtain my diploma as a Registered Nurse. I worked full-time in my career field while raising my family.

My husband and I both chose the public school system for our children. Like my husband, our daughter chose the vocational career path in high school, while our four adult sons chose the college preparatory path. Our daughter went on to become a nanny, and our sons all went to college and obtained professional degrees. All of them currently reside in Ohio, working and raising their families with the plan to have their children attend public schools.

With such a positive experience in the public-school sector, you may ask why I passionately support HB 339. I would respond with the phrase, "I didn't know what I didn't know".

My husband and I welcomed our youngest son in 2012 at the age of one, as a foster child, and his adoption was finalized in 2013. Our son was born with special needs requiring years of medical care, therapy, and special services, all of which are on-going.

Within our son's first year in our family, it became clear that I could not work full-time and continue to care for our son. Quitting my career meant a significant loss of income, as well as our health insurance. However, my husband and I both believed that God would continue to provide for our needs, and we were right.

With all my son's medical and developmental needs, I never would have thought that his educational needs could be met in a NCNP school. However, that proved to be the very environment he needed. We became very comfortable with our current NCNP school when I sought them out for reading tutoring when our son was in the first grade. They utilize the Barton system, which was also recommended by his Neurobehavioral Health physician at Akron Children's Hospital. This is a reading method that was not known or available to us through the public school system but has proven to be very successful for our son.

By the time our son reached fourth grade, it was clear that he was no longer thriving in the public school. Though he had an extensive IEP, it was the large classrooms, inconsistent routine, fast pace and widening social gap with his peers that led us to investigate charter schools and our local Board of DD school program. Neither of those proved to be what he needed.

Last year, in fifth grade, our son started attending the NCNP school. We are fortunate that we have been able to afford this option by making some sacrifices. He is thriving in his new environment. He can complete and master his skills at his own pace with a calm, consistent yet flexible schedule that also meets his social needs.

Prior to adopting our son, I didn't know what options were available for his education, how they are funded and what would work for him specifically. Though the public school system met his needs initially, it was not what was best for him at this stage of his development. I am thankful that we can afford that option. My concern is for those families that are in similar situations to us, or that just prefer that learning environment for their children and cannot afford a NCNP school. Our educational experiences in our formative years contribute greatly to the foundations of our children's academic and social-emotional development. To make available, as a state, the funds that will allow parents to access the educational environment that best provides those needs is the morally responsible choice. Whether that is a public school, charter school, or non-chartered, non-public school.

Thank you so much for your consideration regarding HB 339 and allowing me to provide insight into why this is so important.

Sincerely,

Melissa Vance