



House Bill 407
Testimony in opposition
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Catholic Conference of Ohio
June 4, 2024

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 407.

I am Tom Rhatican, an associate director with the Catholic Conference of Ohio, the official voice of the Catholic Church in Ohio. I am unavailable to testify in person today, but I would like to provide a very brief update on our Catholic Schools and share some of our concerns with the bill.

We have 370 chartered Catholic schools in Ohio, with over 110,000 students—or approximately two-thirds of all chartered, non-public school students in the state. Our newest schools chartered by DEW since HB 33 include a school primarily enrolling would be first-generation college students and a school that only enrolls students with special needs or learning differences.

Parents are the primary educators of their children and deserve an opportunity to choose the best school for their family. The Ed Choice program helps to mitigate the financial concerns of many parents who prefer a Catholic education for their children. Our schools create an atmosphere animated by the Gospel that provides parents with an educational option open to Catholic and non-Catholic students, most of whom are from working poor and middle-income families.

To be eligible for EdChoice or any of the other scholarship programs, our schools must be chartered by the state. As such, and in compliance with current law, our Catholic schools adhere to extensive chartering requirements for accountability and transparency and work closely with the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) to ensure timely and accurate reporting and compliance with the same.

Reported data covers numerous topics, including:

- state operating standards
- health and safety standards
- curriculum
- teacher and professional staff licensures
- many requirements related to federally funded programs, administrative cost reimbursements, and auxiliary services.

In fact, several provisions in the bill may already be satisfied by current reporting requirements, but the data may not be easily accessible at DEW (e.g., the adjusted gross income of scholarship recipients or the school where a student most recently attended).

In the area of testing, many of our schools use both the state test and approved “alternative tests” that are reliable, valid, and correlate to state proficiency levels. Likewise, the recent budget bill (HB 33) requires DEW to develop additional “student growth measures” by July 1, 2025, as part of the assessment reporting requirements (RC 3310.15).

The Attorney General’s office already collects income data of Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) **scholarship recipients** as part of its “certification” that each SGO

“prioritizes awarding its scholarships to low income...students.” (RC 5747.73(C)) I can report that the AG’s office has indeed been gathering relevant data from SGOs as part of their certification process.

While we oppose this bill, we are happy to work with legislators and education stakeholders on areas of shared interest and concern and share more about the chartering process and operating standards that Catholic schools adhere to in order to receive scholarship students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.