

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Position/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Best Contact Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): \_\_\_\_\_

Specific Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*

## Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee – HB 440 – Proponent Testimony

Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Robinson, and fellow members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for hearing proponent testimony on House bill 440 today. My name is Donna Gilcher; I have worked as an Intervention Specialist or School Administrator for the past 30 years. I have been an online tutor with North Coast Tutoring, as well as an online educator for the past eighteen years. I have worked with three different online schools during that time and witnessed what can occur when accountability is not present. I strongly believe in accountability and believe that dynamic and meaningful educational services can be provided virtually.

I have worked online tutoring students under the Autism Scholarship and Jon Peterson Scholarship allowing students and families to access quality tutoring services. Students under my care are provided:

- diagnostic assessments at the start of working with me,
- summative assessments of skills,
- regular progress monitoring, and
- the ability to demonstrate what they know without the fear of others hearing or seeing them getting services.

As a tutor, I can spend time focusing on lesson design, instead of trying to secure a space in a library to meet with students. It eliminates the need for parents to secure rides for students or adjust their own work schedules to accommodate tutoring schedules. Students no longer need to meet late into the evening after a full day of classes and sports practice. Instead of spending a majority of tutoring time focused on helping with homework, we can work on closing skill gaps.

As an online tutor, I have proven to be effective by closing the reading gap of students by two-to-three years in a twelve-month period. I built students' confidence to demonstrate their learned skills with parents, family, and community activities. Two students participated in Ohio's College Credit Plus classes. One student graduated from Tri-C one day and her private school the next. When this young lady began working with me, she was in the seventh grade. She had a 3rd-grade reading level, had limited phonetic skills, could not decode grade-level vocabulary, and struggled to keep up. She was embarrassed to be tutored at her local library. The family was also dealing with two grandparents battling cancer, causing frequent interruptions in our tutoring schedule. I began providing services to her online in a desire to give her consistency and access without the need for her parents to transport her. Within a month, I discovered she was mastering phonetic skills faster, and engaged in her tutoring. With the convenience of tutoring online, we could meet twice a week instead of once. Within a year, her decoding skills, comprehension, and fluency had improved two grade levels. By the time she graduated, we had successfully closed the gap, and she was reading at a 1300 Lexile with 95% comprehension and, with accommodations, was taking college-level classes. This would not have occurred with in-person tutoring.

I have a student with severe dyslexia who tutors four days a week with me at 6:30 A.M., and she lives 50 minutes from me in a rural part of Ohio. This is the only time that works in the family's

schedule and does not disrupt her attending a parochial school. This student, a rising fourth grader, is now reading at a second-grade level through diagnostic testing completed by North Coast and her school. She began tutoring at a Pre-K level in the fall of 2023, and we were informed last week that she passed the third-grade reading test with the accommodation of a human reader. Without the flexibility of online tutoring services with a licensed Intervention specialist she would not have been able to access comprehensive reading instruction and to be on the road to closing the learning gap.

As an online tutor, I can provide Tier two and three interventions for students in an atmosphere that honors and supports the student and family's right to FAPE. By enacting legislation that guarantees virtual education options for scholarship students ensures school choice for parents who choose to utilize the scholarships. These are only a few of the examples of students I have worked with from those with multiple disabilities including immune deficiencies, and severe social anxieties. Each of these students has their growth measured monthly, parents are informed of their student's progress. When students are not making growth, I quickly review the data, provide modifications, or differentiation of instruction. Each student is provided access to online supplemental materials to allow them additional practice and are challenged to develop independent and lifelong learning skills.

I strongly encourage you to support HB 440, which would allow for high-quality individualized instruction for students on the Autism and Jon Peterson Scholarship.