

Dear Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, and Ranking Member Robinson,

Thank you for considering my written testimony regarding HB 407, which would create regulations and public reporting requirements for chartered, nonpublic schools. My understanding is that HB 407 would require increased financial reporting, require schools to have a policy for how they make admissions decisions, require most voucher students to take the same tests as public school students, and require the Department of Education and Workforce to issue a similar report card for private schools that have more than 25 percent or more of its students on vouchers.

The expanded EdChoice Voucher plan is unconstitutional because it uses public funds for private schools. Initially, the state's voucher program was intended (at least ostensibly) to provide alternatives for students in "failing" public schools. But what started as an experiment has become a huge drain on Ohio's budget.

In 2022, the bipartisan Cupp-Patterson school funding bill finally addressed the (overly) property-tied school funding plan that the Ohio Supreme Court had repeatedly declared unconstitutional over the course of many years. The Cupp-Patterson plan (Fair School Funding Plan), met constitutional requirements and had good bipartisan support. It might have passed, but at the end of the 2022 General Assembly, the Senate president declined to bring the bill to the Senate floor. Instead, he promised to include the Fair School Funding Plan in the 2023 budget.

The Senate president kept his promise. The Fair School Funding Plan was, indeed, included in the 2023 budget. However, the budget ALSO provided for a greatly expanded school voucher plan. Ostensibly, this voucher plan's funding does not come from the Fair School Funding Plan – so technically, the plan would not take money away from public schools.

As might have been anticipated, however, there was an aggressive push for citizens to make use of the expanded voucher program, which no longer requires recipients to be in poverty or to live in districts with "failing" schools. The push for citizens to make use of vouchers not only came from legislators, but also from private schools that stood to gain from the expanded voucher program. In particular, priests and principals of Catholic schools have been urging parishioners to apply for the voucher program. It should not be surprising that, in 2023, almost 55 percent of Ohio voucher students did not attend public schools before they took a voucher. See <https://www.ncpecoalition.org/voucher-recipients#:~:text=ohio,to%20almost%2055%25%20in%202023>.

When the voucher plan started (as an experiment), it cost the state \$1,229 per voucher. In the 2023-24 school year, high school vouchers are \$8,407 and K-8 vouchers are worth \$6,165. The vast majority of public schools receive far less money per pupil for K-8 and high school students from the state. See <https://vouchershurtohio.com/faq/>.

Since the expanded voucher program is now a reality in Ohio, costing the state more than \$1 billion in the 2023-24 school year, the VERY LEAST the legislature can do is to require nonpublic schools to be held accountable in some ways for the taxpayer money they are receiving. HB 407 would help to provide a measure of much-needed accountability. (Surely we

have not forgotten the ECOT scandal? ECOT still owes Ohio \$117 million! See <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2022/07/07/ecot-owes-ohio-117-million-what-are-we-going-to-do-about-it/#:~:text=>)

Public schools area already are held accountable in all the ways nonpublic schools would be held accountable if HB 407 passes. But public schools also bear many burdens that nonpublic schools do not have to consider. For example, public school systems have long provided transportation for students in their districts who attend private schools. This is costly! In addition, public school districts must accept all students, and must address any special needs they might have.

It is only fair that nonpublic schools that are (unconstitutionally) taking taxpayer funding should be held to at least SOME of the standards of our constitutionally mandated public school system.

Please pass HB 407!

Sincerely,

Deborah Cooper