

HB 407

Proponent Testimony

Primary and Secondary Education Committee

November 2024

Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the committee, thank you for taking the time to read my testimony today. I received my PhD in Educational Policy Studies in 2005. I am currently a professor at the University of Cincinnati, though I am not officially representing the university today. I support school choice; in fact, I have used a school choice program for my son. I was raised to support Republican values that are aligned with school choice, including the rights of parents and support of the free market system, but I also recognize that proper oversight and accountability of public tax dollars is essential. Some Republicans may wrongly worry that this bill introduces regulation, but this bill is about data gathering, not regulation. This bill provides data so that in the future legislators and parents can make informed decisions about how vouchers are being used and may help families make better choices when selecting a school. HB 407 should be supported because it moves us toward better oversight that will ensure that public money is well-spent and students are well-served. Moreover, this bill can help us head off some of the more problematic aspects of vouchers. HB 407:

- *Increases accountability.* Shifting students to private and religious schools that have fewer oversight via the rapid expansion of Ohio voucher programs, has jeopardized our ability to maintain accountability for the content and quality of education those children receive and the ability of the public to oversee how funds are spent. This bill provides data that can be used to ensure that funds are being used appropriately.
- *Provides data needed to identifying failing schools.* Too often failing voucher schools do not close and are propped up by taxpayer funds. Researchers have found that many underperforming voucher schools fail to close, as would have been predicted under market logic, due to lack of demand. Rather, many parents stayed put in these schools, thereby demonstrating that competition and markets are not failsafes for ensuring good schooling. This bill helps to provide the sort of data that can help us identify and handle chronically low performing private schools that should not be propagated by vouchers.
- *Clarifies the academic performance of voucher schools.* If we want to support parents in choosing alternative schools for their children and to deem them worthy of taxpayer funds, then those schools, teachers, and practices need to be of high quality. They should take the same tests as public school children to provide comparable data on the quality of education they provide.
- *Identifies potential discrimination.* Unfortunately, some private schools supported by vouchers have a long history of contributing to racial and economic segregation. This bill requires schools to articulate how they are selecting their students and why others are turned away. This can help the state better determine whether admissions decisions are being made fairly and without discrimination toward any particular group of children, as public tax dollars should equally support all demographics of citizens.
- *Offers insight into economic trends in voucher use.* Some of the most worrisome initial data on the voucher expansion program indicates that vouchers are being used disproportionately by wealthier families, some of whom use the vouchers to purchase even more elite education than they were prior to receiving a voucher. This bill will help us identify who is, in fact, being served by vouchers. Such data may help legislators and citizens decide whether voucher funds are being spent appropriately.

Let us use data to promote good choices, not all choices. HB 407 provides some of the information that can help us ensure that public dollars are well-spent and children are well-served. Please vote YES.

Respectfully,

Dr. Sarah Stitzlein