



House Bill 407
Testimony – Interested Party
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Catholic Conference of Ohio
November 20, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as an interested party on the substitute bill to HB 407 (I_135_1522-3).

I'd like to update and augment our original testimony based on the changes included in the substitute bill. While we appreciate the removal of some provisions, our underlying concerns remain.

To be brief, the bill still creates unnecessary burdens on our Catholic schools without any discernable benefit.

We have over 370 “chartered non-public” Catholic schools in Ohio. Upon receiving a charter from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW), our schools adhere to extensive chartering requirements for accountability and transparency and work closely with DEW to ensure timely and accurate reporting and compliance. Reported data covers numerous topics, including our compliance with robust and extensive state operating standards, health and safety standards, and teacher licensing.

The remaining provisions in the substitute bill provide little “value-added” while generating more administrative work and some unnecessary risk. First, requiring every one of our 370 schools to submit their “admissions criteria” is a burdensome administrative solution in search of a problem. The Church and our Catholic schools have always had a preferential option for low-income families and are determined not to turn away families with lower incomes. Likewise, and as a reflection of our mission to reach all families who seek a quality Catholic education, the population of our minority students has increased both in number and as a percentage of the student population.

Second, collecting “prior enrollment data” is a task better administered by the DEW through the scholarship application process – and not collected and reported by our schools.

Third, while public schools have some degree of liability protection (sovereign immunity) with regard to maintaining and transferring student disciplinary records, our schools do not. The Legislative Service Commission notes in the bill analysis that the “record of a student in a public school is subject to state and federal student privacy laws” – protections also extended to “community schools, STEM schools, and college-preparatory boarding schools.” But not extended to private schools.

Fourth, the substitute still requires that the DEW establish a “report card” – in addition to creating a similar assessment of “growth measures” as required by the recent budget bill (HB 33). While we oppose the creation of a “report card,” we look forward to working with the Department on the promulgation of “student growth measures” required to go into effect by July 1, 2025.

Lastly, on the issue of SGOs, the substitute bill shifts the requirement for schools to report the income of an SGO recipient to the Department. I see this as unworkable on many levels but have not had an opportunity to research the proposal in time for today's hearing.

In summary, while we are pleased with the elimination of several provisions in the original bill, we still see many administrative burdens that do not provide value to families interested in our Catholic schools or anything that would help the DEW meaningfully evaluate our schools.

As always, we are happy to work with legislators and education stakeholders on areas of continued interest and concern.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.