



## **House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education (HB 33)**

March 16, 2023

Good morning Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and Committee Members. My name is Frank O'Linn. I am the superintendent of schools for the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, which educates more than 38,000 P-12 students in 106 schools across 8 counties of Northeast Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 33.

We commend the effort to continue to increase school funding for all sectors, traditional public, charter, vocational, STEM school, etc, by continuing or increasing the phase-in of the inputs-based model, and funding students where they are educated. We are grateful for so many things Ohio provides for all of its school students, as my colleague Larry Keough of the Catholic Conference addressed in detail.

We also applaud the movement to provide increased student access to the EdChoice state scholarships. We appreciate that the budget as introduced increases EdChoice eligibility to 400% of the federal poverty level, and we especially support the movements in this chamber and the senate to expand school choice scholarships to be universally available.

In addition to keeping with the direction to fund students where they are educated, including funding parents who wish to place their children in non-public schools, there are many benefits to universality:

### **Reducing Barriers**

First, universal access would remove barriers that prevent families from choosing schools. For example, appended to this testimony (Appendix A) is a letter from a parent at St. Anthony school in Akron, written in his native Karenic language, with translation below by his child. St. Anthony opened in 1954 to serve the children of Akron's North Hill neighborhood, which back then were mostly Italian immigrants. Today it is home to one of the nation's largest populations of refugees from Myanmar (Burma), many of whom fled persecution and stayed at refugee camps in Thailand before immigrating to the U.S.

While the school tries to assist, language and other barriers are sometimes too much as they report significant numbers of interested parents falling out of the process while verifying residence or income through an online application in a language foreign to them. Making scholarships universal would simplify eligibility, removing such barriers for our most disadvantaged families and also reducing the system bureaucracy required to process it.

### **Eliminating Stigma**

Universality would also eliminate any stigma associated with the programs, which is a barrier particularly in the many schools in which only a portion of attendees qualify for the scholarship. Wherever the threshold is set, whether 250%, 400%, or some other number, there will be communities with both sides of the cutoff, including taxpaying Ohioans who are no less deserving of quality education.

### **Improving Efficiency**

Each student educated on state scholarship represents substantial savings on average compared to the state's obligation in the funding formula, and our nonpublic systems have room to educate more students. Universality would enable the state's savings to grow and be sustained over the long-term.

You can think of Catholic schools as a public-private partnership for parents with scholarships. The 106 schools in the Diocese of Cleveland expend well over \$300 Million to educate the 38,476 students in grades P-12. Tuition, whether paid by state scholarships or by parents, guardians, and families, accounts for roughly 70% of revenues in the system. The rest - around \$100 Million in our diocese alone - is made up of local and diocesan philanthropy, endowments, parish subsidy from churches, and other annual giving. Making choice universal enables more Ohioans to participate, a win-win for parents and the state.

### **The Cleveland Scholarship as Exemplar**

A shining example of universal school choice already exists in Cleveland, where the Cleveland Scholarship began in 1996, first with numerous restrictions to scholarship access and growth. Over the years, those restrictions have fallen away, making the scholarship universal for any resident of Cleveland since 2015.

Meanwhile, the public schools' Cleveland Plan, launched in 2012 via [H.B. 525](#), called "to ensure that every child in Cleveland attends a high-quality school and that every neighborhood has a multitude of great schools from which families can choose." Primarily focused on district and charter schools, Cleveland has made parental choice a

cornerstone of its improvement strategy, which has since demonstrated growth in public school graduation rates, K-3 literacy rates, and high-quality preschool seats. The progress is simultaneous with a robust charter sector and our nonpublic schools, which historically and [continually perform well](#) by [comparison to their nearest public counterparts](#).

As the charts below illustrate, there has been steady enrollment and funding delivered by the foundation formula both before and since the new funding model's implementation (Appendix B).

Our Catholic elementary schools are primarily neighborhood schools that reflect the diversity of their surrounding communities. Catholic high schools, which draw from wider geographic areas, tend to be less racially isolated and produce higher graduation rates and college acceptance rates for those who attend on the Cleveland scholarship including [being 5 times more likely](#) to meet the "prepared for success" benchmarks.

Finally, the notion of choice, empowering parents and guardians to choose the best placement for their children, is what parents desire. Recent listening sessions across the city, as Cleveland searches for a new public school CEO, revealed that "Championing school choice for families and students" emerged as the [top positive trend](#) from stakeholders. This is an example of a healthy choice ecosystem at work.

Ohio's Catholic schools are all chartered non-public schools, which are accountable to Ohio's Operating standards, report test scores of all scholarship students, and are directly accountable to parents. They provide a valuable good to the state as well as to families and society, and they have available capacity.

## **On Taxation**

As this committee and chamber wrestles with complex questions, including the structure of taxation in our state's future, please do not ignore what Bishop Richard Gilmour, Bishop of Cleveland 150 years ago referred to as the "double tax," describing those who pay their fare share of taxes to the state, but feel a moral obligation to educate their children in a different setting than the state offers them. Universal expansion of EdChoice is a form of tax relief that Ohio's parents desire and appreciate when they are empowered to choose the best educational settings for their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to answering any questions.

Appendix A: Letter from a Parent

၂၅၅၃ . ၀၃ . ၀၃ . ၂၀၂၃

ဧ

ကိုသရဉ် / မ ကိုဗျာမသဂိးဟ် ခဲလၢ်မံပဉ္စစကစိန်ဂုဉ်  
သုဒိး ခုးဘဉ်သုဉ်အဘျးအဖျိန်ကိးကဒဲးတဉ် ( အံ မ့ၤ )

စံး ဘျးဘဉ် St. Anthony ကိုသရဉ်သရဉ်မုဉ်  
ခဲလၢ်လၢသုဉ်ပျးသုဉ်တဖဉ်လၢ အသုဉ်ဂုး သးဝါဒိး ရှဉ် ကျးစၢး  
တၢ်လၢထံ ကိၢ်တၢ်လဲး ထီၣ်လဲး ထီ အိၣ် . သုတဉ် ကျိဒိန်စံးအါ  
ဗျးတၢ်ဘဉ်သုဉ်ပျးလၢအအိန်ဘဉ်ပယံၣ် ဖိလိဖိ ဒိးသုဉ်သုဉ်  
ပျး လျးလၢပထီမုဉ်ဖိခွါတဖဉ်အိၣ်အလိစံး ဘျးဘဉ်ကုးသုဉ်  
ပသးဒိဖျါဉ်ညါဒိန်မးလိး . မ့တဖျါလၢ သုဉ်ဗးပျးဘဉ်ဒိးလၢ  
ပဂျိကတၢ်ဒိန်ဝဲပစၢလၢကျဲဒိး ဗျာပထီပလံၤလၢ ကိုဒိန်ပလၢအိ  
တဘဉ်ဘဉ် . ဒီဖျါလၢသုဉ် ကိုသရဉ်သရဉ်မုဉ်တဖဉ်သုတဉ်ဖိ  
ဟ်အသုဉ်အအိန်စံးအဖျါကလုဉ်သုဉ်လိး . စိဘဉ်အလိ စံးဘျး  
ဘဉ်ကုးသုဉ် သးဒိ ဖျါဉ်ညါ ဒုးလိး .

စံးလိး - မဲဘဉ် ယဉ် .  
( ကိုဖိဖျါဟ် )

**Translation:**

March 3, 2023

We want to thank all teachers and all that contributed to helping our family. May God bless you all and provide you with all the goodness he can. Amen.

Thank you all St. Anthony teachers for having a good heart and for helping us with providing for our children and to help them prosper. You do not discriminate and are people who love our family regardless of our status and ethnicity. You help us to find a path for our children so we want to thank you with all of our hearts. If it were not for your help, we ourselves could not help our children with finding a good school and path for education. The scholarship process was very difficult because it was not in our language. But you helped us every step of the way. Without your guidance, we would not have been able to get a scholarship for our child. Because of you all who did not look at us different and helped us so much we want to thank you with all of our hearts.

~Member Yar

## Appendix B: Enrollment and Funding of Traditional Public and Cleveland Scholarship

