

To: Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education

Re: HB 33
Proponent Testimony

From: Jason Guilliams, 444 Colt Circle, Bellville, OH 44813
Councilman / Finance & Human Resources Committee Chair, Village of Bellville
President, Mansfield Christian School Board
Vice Chairman, State Farm Federal PAC State Advisory Committee
Elder Apprentice, Crossroads Community Church
2023 Board Member Candidate, Richland County Foundation
Board Chairman (2013-2022), Buckeye Imagination Museum

Date: March 13, 2023

Dear Honorable Chairwoman Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and Members of the Committee:

I am Jason Guilliams and I am asking you to vote to amend the budget bill, HB 33, and insert HB 11, commonly known as The Backpack Bill.

Serving others is a foundational tenet of our family and is demonstrated, in part, through my work in various elected and appointed facets of our community and throughout our state. My wife, Tricia, and I have been married for 21 years after meeting at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. Tricia is a graduate of Mansfield Christian School and I am graduate of Lexington Local School District. Incredible sacrifices were made by my in-laws because they were prohibited from receiving educational funds they paid into through taxes because of their choice of education and that story continues for too many still today.

Tricia and I were married 10 years before we were able to have our first child. This was after years of extensive and expensive infertility and genetic testing. Imagine our relief and gratitude when we received the news that our firstborn, Jackson, was a healthy baby. We were elated at receiving this miracle! Throughout the 10 years of miscarriages, disappointments, discouragement, and trusting God had a plan in place to grow our family, we became increasingly burdened for the orphaned and knew that adoption would become a part of our journey too. Fast forward 5 years after Jackson was born...We had endured countless mounds of paperwork and home studies, and a costly failed adoption; all contributing to the increasing cost of growing our family. Then the day came that we had been longing for...our baby girl was born. We rushed down to Florida, signed necessary papers, and walked into the NICU to meet our baby girl for the first time. Throughout the grueling 18 days in NICU, we knew adoption was the right decision and we would never take Emmy's life for granted, reinforcing our commitment to advocate for what is best for our children...always! Thinking our family was complete, we received an unexpected call when Emmy was 7 months old. An adoption plan was dissolving and there was a boy that would be born in 8 week who needed a family. He, too, would require time in the NICU. With a 5 year old and a 9 month old, we rushed down to Florida, again. We are grateful that Tobin, too, is a healthy and thriving little boy. The road to growing our family was costly and we believe it was worth every penny. To best meet the needs of our children, both known and unknown, Tricia chose to stay at home with our children...another financial sacrifice. We have been

blessed financially in many ways, but entering parenthood for us cost tens of thousands of dollars. Therefore, to assume that families currently exceeding income limits have excess abilities to provide even more money toward children's education is misguided. We intentionally make it a priority to give back to our community and around the world financially and serving our community with our time, while still doing our best to protect the needs of what is best for our family.

When our children began to reach school age, we knew we had a decision to make. Our local public school district was in the middle of building a new state-of-the-art elementary building and had a strong history of academic success. Plus the school district was getting a substantial portion of our property taxes, a 1% income tax, and benefited from our State of Ohio income taxes. One might think the decision would be obvious as to why we should just enroll our children in the public-school option. However, our approach to education was approached methodically and with intentionality just as other decisions we made as parents...in the best interest of our children...not their zip code, not what was convenient, not what was less of a financial burden...simply what we believed was in the best interest of our children given their unique skill, abilities, and needs. We chose to enroll in our academically and spiritually excellent education option, Mansfield Christian School. But, this came, again, at a significant cost. Now with all 3 of our children enrolled, the cost burden continues to increase even though we are providing a substantial amount of money toward education through tax dollars already.

Public school options are, and continue to be, the right option for many students across our state. However, many schools, including our rural local public school, are dealing with issues occurring in classrooms that don't belong with administrators refusing to tackle the challenges of the day by fighting for excellence, not just test scores. I am asking that you empower families to choose what is right for our families. Families should not have to incur greater sacrifices due to our convictions. Values matter and should be left to the parent's choice.

The current monopoly of one size fits all is not working for Ohio! Our kids are falling behind year after year. Families need options to use their education tax dollars that are best suited for the needs of their children.

I would like to address the narrative that private schools steal public funds and public schools suffer as the result. This is simply not true. If this were indeed the case, EdChoice would have been abandoned during the recession 13 years ago as the population of both the state and our schools declined rapidly. We know that education contains both fixed costs and variable costs. Studies that examine the savings and costs of America's private school programs, such as Martin Lueken's, *Fiscal Effects of School Vouchers* (2018)*, demonstrate the significance of these costs to this discussion.

The fixed costs for education remain stable whether a child is enrolled in a particular school or not, such as utilities, maintenance, and administrative expenses (approx.. \$5,000 per student in Ohio). Variable costs are those directly connected to the student such as the teacher, curriculum, and other needed resources (approx.. \$8,000 in Ohio). The variable costs leave when a student leaves and the district does not spend that money. In Ohio, fittingly, those variable costs may be sent to a private school in the form of a voucher for that student ranging from \$5,500-\$7,500. Leuken's analysis

demonstrated that in Ohio, as in other voucher states, as long as the amount deducted from the state's per pupil contribution is less than the per student variable costs, there is no net financial harm to the public school. The costs to the public school go down by an amount greater than the loss of the scholarship amount. In fact, the district saves money and may increase the per pupil expenditures for those who remain because it keeps the fixed cost allocation as well as the difference between the voucher amount and the variable costs. No fiscal analysis of any voucher programs in the United States that accounts for both costs and savings, has found that these programs result in a net negative fiscal impact on taxpayers.

The Backpack Bill is an equitable approach to education for so many families that otherwise would never have access to schools that align with their values and the educational objectives for their children. In this sense, I must address fit over eligibility. Families do not necessarily leave a public school simply because they are eligible. If this were true, private school enrollment should have increased significantly in the last 17 years in Ohio and across the country, but this has not been the case. Private Christian schools exist for a specific mission; most commonly to serve as an extension of the Christian home and church in teaching and training students from a biblical worldview. At no point during the admissions process, are EdChoice scholarship families considered outside of this purpose. If the values of the family and student fit the mission, then our schools work tirelessly to succeed with the child. Mansfield Christian School has graduated 150+ EdChoice scholarship students over 17 years. Only after these students were afforded an educational choice and the priority of missional fit resolved, did these families commit to an MCS education.

As a resident, taxpayer, and constituent, the decisions you make affect my children, my family, and my community. I am asking you, again, to allow our taxpayer money already allocated toward education to be used at the parent's discretion with appropriate controls in place. Allow the people of the Great State of Ohio to demonstrate innovation in education excellence by voting to amend the budget by inserting HB 11 in HB 33.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on the Backpack bill as it relates to HB33. I appreciate your consideration of my perspective as a parent, school board member, and elected official in Ohio.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Guilliams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jason Guilliams

* <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Fiscal-Effects-of-School-Vouchers-by-Martin-Lueken.pdf>