

HB 33 Proponent Testimony
Lujain Abudulwahed, Senior attending the Dayton Early College Academy
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Chair Tracy Richardson
March 21, 2023

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. My name is Lujain Abudulwahed. I am a senior at Dayton Early College Academy, and I will be attending THE Ohio State University in the fall of 2023, as a Young Scholars Program (YSP) full scholarship recipient. Unlike many of my classmates, I am not the first in my family to go to college. In fact, in 2010 when my family immigrated here from Jordan, my parents' dream was that all of us could receive the best education possible. I follow in the footsteps of prioritizing my education from my mother who completed her masters in 2020, my brother, a DECA alumnus who graduated from Ohio State University, and my sister who is also an alumna of DECA and now a junior at OSU. All my siblings and I received the YSP full scholarship.

When we first arrived in Ohio, we were placed in public schools near our home, but when my parents learned about DECA's standards and demand for success, they quickly enrolled each of us there. I have been a student of DECA since fourth grade and wouldn't trade my experience here for anywhere else in the world. The opportunities DECA has offered to me will continue to impact my life for years to come.

Some may ask, what is so different about DECA? Among the many things I could use to explain what I see, there are two things that come to mind. The first is the academic rigor and expectations asked of DECA students. As much as I say I don't like the extra work that DECA asks of us, I see the impact it is having on not only my current education, but my future educational endeavors as well. At DECA each student is required to complete a minimum of two college classes. Amongst my peers from other schools in these classes, I have witnessed an astounding difference in my academic and presentation skills in comparison to them. While it is incredibly hard to meet the expectations of excellence DECA teachers have, I know that I am being set up for college success.

Along with DECA's high academic standards, the DECA difference comes from the teachers. The high standards that I spoke about would be too much if it weren't for the passion and care that our teachers show. DECA teachers push you, but in a way that you feel seen, heard, cared about, and respected. This level of push with the balance of deep relationships, yields a learner who stands heads above their peers.

If nothing else, what I want to communicate today is that DECA is one the very few options for kids in Dayton who want to be prepared for college. According to the Ohio Report Cards, DECA is the highest performing public school within the boundaries of the Dayton Public School district. My family could not

afford private school, nor was moving an option. Without DECA, I am convinced I would not have received the academic preparation necessary for college. Maybe more importantly, at DECA I received the personalized attention of my teachers who set the bar high and relentlessly supported me to reach those expectations.

As I stand before you today, I have a question of my own that I would like to ask. Having grown up in the halls of DECA, I have learned many things about charter schools, even how they are funded. Did you know charter schools receive 27% less state funding than traditional schools? So I ask you, Is my education worth 27% less than students in a traditional school setting? Is my learning 27% less important because I went to a high achieving charter school and prioritized my learning?

I trust that as you debate this budget, you will remember me and other students like me. My school has been developed over the past nineteen years with one clear mission: to prepare kids like me from the city of Dayton to earn a college degree and become productive Ohio citizens. We track our graduates and I can tell you with confidence that DECA graduates are completing college at five times—five times---the national rate of 10% for students of similar demographics. Not bad for a school that is free to attend and enrolls students on a first-come, first-serve basis!

DECA has the metrics to ensure that the State's investment is a good one. Having a solid education is the only thing that stops the cycle of poverty where I live. I hope my story is compelling to you. It is the story of hundreds of other DECA grads like me.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today.