

## **Mike Uecker School Vouchers Testimony, 22 March 2023**

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and Honorable Members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on school choice in House Bill 33.

My name is Mike Uecker, and I am a veteran of the United States Air Force, living in Greene County near Fairborn, Ohio

Why would I want to address the committee on this subject? As a person who grew up in Clermont County in a family of 7 children and parents with only high school diplomas, I became aware at an early age of the importance of education. Indeed, it was so important that for most of my life Dad's vacation was merely a time when he was home doing the things he had no time to do when he was working. He did so because all my siblings attended parochial schools with real tuition bills that the family had to pay for. Indeed, I worked summer jobs and parttime jobs to earn the money to pay my own high school tuition.

Because of that background I was able to attend the US Air Force Academy, graduating in 1971, and then spending over 20 years on active duty, 8 years as a weapons systems officer flying bombers in the Strategic Air Command and the balance as a Research and Development program manager working several programs, including a new aircraft, modifications to old aircraft, training systems and space launch systems. Following retirement from active duty, I remained in the defense sector serving the Air Force both as a contractor and as a civil servant until retirement in 2017. I just completed 11 years as a member of two school boards in Greene County – Fairborn City Schools and the Greene County Career Center.

Why do I tell you that? Because my education and experience gives me a different perspective than most of my associates in Ohio Public Education. Excellence is what has kept the United States free as it competes with other countries and other ideologies in a world with a vast history of Nations and empires that have fallen by the wayside. In the majority of cases, their downfall was caused mainly by corruption and incompetence in government. For anyone who thinks that Human Nature is progressing to a higher state, I strongly advise that you look to history as it will reveal that there has been little to no change in Human Nature in 5000 years.

How does this relate to the Educational Choice and the Back Pack Bills currently under consideration in the General Assembly? I submit that competition is key,

whether you are talking about weapons systems, commercial products, or education.

We won the Cold War because we had the best weapons and best trained armed forces led by the best-qualified leaders. While I served, I strongly believed that our armed forces were most interested in three characteristics in their leaders: competency, moral courage, and character. One of the worst things that happened to our military was that we won the Cold War and it was decided that we could relax and turn our attention inward. In 1991, we were so effective against Iraq's military that the President stopped the rout out of a sense of mercy. Twenty years later, in 2021, we suffered a stunning defeat in our withdrawal from Afghanistan, losing 13 soldiers and billions of dollars of military hardware to a small rebel force.

Back in the Cold War days, America had one of the best education systems in the world – now it is not even in the top 25 in math or in the top 10 in English and reading.

I could go on with other examples (e.g. American cars in the 1970's), but the point is that competition makes for a better product and better value. Competition gives the victory to the most competent, most innovative and best led. Competition incentivizes organizations to make the changes necessary to build or rebuild its customer base and gain market share.

Right now, there is no effective competition in education. After paying property and payroll taxes, working families find it very difficult to pony up \$5,000+ dollars for tuition for a K-8 parochial school or even more for a private school. High school tuition is more than double that.

And public school stakeholders know and leverage those facts to ensure their own objectives are met and their power is never threatened. They also complain that vouchers will hurt the public schools, despite the fact that not a penny of the local tax will go to the voucher parents, so all the local money will be divided up among fewer students when parents take their children out of the public school system (i.e., more money per student).

Moreover, we have gone from a school system where every student started the day saying the Pledge of Allegiance and The Lord's Prayer to today's sexually explicit and pornographic content in the libraries for children of all ages, and where teachers expose children to sexual content and even sex changes starting in kindergarten.

How could Ohio's first public schools have promoted morality and religion, when today they are either indifferent or hostile to those values? Any honest and rigorous study of history reveals that the teaching of religion and morality was commonplace, not only in Ohio's first government schools, but all across 19th century America. Surprisingly, most current historians have ignored the Christian philosophy, motives, and leaders that laid the foundation of that vital institution. An honest study of history will show that: Evangelicals -- many of them devout ministers and missionaries -- started the schools primarily to promote Bible study that would result in Christian values and discipleship; Horace Mann's role as the founder of our public schools is a myth perpetrated by liberal historians of the past 100 years.

Regardless of how we got here, this is where we are. And we must improve education or our Nation will join other great nations as a footnote in a history book.

Why Vouchers? Because without tuition assistance through vouchers, most parents cannot afford to send their children to the schools that will provide a better learning environment for each child. Because without competition, there is no incentive for the schools to get back to the level of twenty years ago, let alone going back to really teaching reading (phonics), writing (diagramming sentences), and arithmetic (learning the multiplication tables, fractions, and Marxism-free algebra). Nor will students really learn the reasons that millions of people from all over the world wish to migrate to the US, and relatively not nearly as many Americans emigrate to other countries.

Our current system actually hurts the poor the most as they are the least able to pay for alternatives that would prepare their children to be the best they can be. We cannot continue our current system which works for the education establishment and some wealthy school districts, but utterly fails too many of the children. If you really care about ending ignorance and poverty, especially among minorities and disadvantaged groups, competition is the only way. And we can only have competition if we give our education tax dollars to the parents, not the government institutions.

Thank you.