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HB 33 School Choice

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Senate Education Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on school choice for House Bill 33.

My name is Tera Myers, and I live in Mansfield, Ohio. I recognize that the proposed plan would be a positive step in the right direction for school choice in Ohio, but I would like Backpack Bill language to be amended into House Bill 33.

Every child in Ohio matters, and every parent, regardless of geographical location, deserves to choose where their child is educated. I know the difficulties of navigating the current education system and being left with a “one size fits all system” of education. Fortunately for my children and me, our legislature saw the need to provide choice when our district school was deemed failing and again when we worked hard to provide for students like my son who have exceptional learning needs with the passage of the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship. Today I still ask, “Why not every parent of every student?” Adding the language of The Backpack Bill to HB 33 would solve this problem.

No family should ever have to settle for a program that is not working for their children, regardless of the reasons. I remember all too well how hard we tried to make our public program work for all of our children. I was told, “Go home and take the six-and-a-half-hour break” and “Let us do what we do.” When I asked why my son was not being taught how he would learn best, I was told, “We have up to the day he graduates to teach him how to read.” Or when I had to crawl under the back seat of my minivan to pull my six-year-old daughter out because she was trembling from seeing the bullies that had been taunting her at recess. The principal told me to tell her to get over it. This was all unacceptable, and I never wanted another parent to feel the heartbreak I felt when I was told. “Go ahead and take your children elsewhere; you can’t do it without us; we control all the funds.” Education should never be a monopoly system; it should always be about what is best for the children. All three of our children have become well-educated, productive members of society. I am confident that the choice programs they were afforded made this possible. Every parent in Ohio deserves those same choices that I was afforded, and no other parent should be forced to endure what our family did.

When the Jon Peterson Scholarship was passed, I heard many concerns about how it would wreck the public system, leaving only the least behind, and only a few private programs would be offered for students like my son. None of that was true. We still have not reached the scholarship cap almost twelve years after the passage. New programs are opening almost yearly, and we have not had a single mass exodus causing collapse at any public program in Ohio. Many families are happy with their current education options; they are going nowhere.

Families that are unhappy or need something different should have the power to choose. We, as taxpayers, should be able to have the ability to prioritize how our money is spent. Choice does not take away from anyone; it empowers everyone.

Education Freedom isn't an "us against them" idea. It merely allows the parents to choose the best education for their children. When families can easily make these decisions, it creates unity, collaboration, and commitment. There is no good reason to disallow a student to be eligible for the best education possible. Ohio has gotten it right so many times in the recent past. I know that this committee's members and our great state's legislature want to do what is best for our children. I ask you to please include the language in The Backpack Bill to HB 33.

Thank you for hearing my testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions.