

Ohio Alliance of Independent Schools

May 4, 2023

Senate Education Committee

House Bill 33 – Interested Party Testimony
Dan Dodd – Executive Director
Ohio Alliance of Independent Schools

- Andrews Osborne Academy
- Birchwood School of Hawken
- Canton Country Day School
- Central Montessori Academy
- Cincinnati Country Day School
- Cincinnati Hills
Christian Academy
- Columbus Academy
- Columbus Jewish Day School
- Columbus School for Girls
- Columbus Torah Academy
- Gilmour Academy
- Grand River Academy
- Hathaway Brown
- Hawken School
- Hershey Montessori School
- Hudson Montessori School
- Jos. and Florence Mandel Jewish Day School
- Lake Ridge Academy
- Laurel School
- The Lawrence School
- The Lillian and Betty Ratner School
- Linden Grove School
- The Lippman School
- Mansion Day School
- Marburn Academy
- Maumee Valley Country Day School
- McGuffey Montessori School
- The Miami Valley School
- The New School
- Old Trail School
- Olney Friends School
- Ridgewood School
- Ruffing Montessori School -
Cleveland Heights
- Ruffing Montessori - Rocky River
- The Schilling School for
Gifted Children
- The Seven Hills School
- Summit Country Day School
- University School
- Urban Community School
- Wellington School
- Welsh Hills School
- Western Reserve Academy

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present brief testimony regarding HB 33. Our organization is focused on improving the educational and regulatory environment for Ohio's independent schools. OAIS would urge the Senate to consider the following issues as part of the state's biennial budget:

Scholarship Granting Organization Tax Credit: In HB 110, the General Assembly established an income tax credit for donations made to scholarship granting organizations (SGO) to fund scholarships for primarily low-income students. Since the establishment of the credit, over 20 SGOs have been certified by the Ohio Attorney General's office. Thousands of donors have made donations to these SGOs in order to give additional financial aid to Ohio's neediest students.

The cap on the credit is \$750 for an individual filing, or \$1,500 for a joint filing. OAIS operates an SGO for some members, and we have received multiple requests from donors asking if there would ever be an increase in the cap. To give more students the opportunity to receive a high-quality education at their school of choice, we would recommend increasing the cap to \$2,500 for single filings and \$5,000 for joint filings. We would also recommend offering those paying commercial activity tax (CAT) a credit against their CAT liability. Such a credit would offer increased resources for schools to provide scholarships to more low-income students.

Pupil Transportation Reform: Despite the promising changes made in the last biennial budget to produce greater safeguards for chartered nonpublic school students utilizing pupil transportation, families still have a great deal of difficulty securing reliable busing to their schools. School districts continue to find ways to cut off students from transportation options by offering payment-in-lieu-of-transportation amounts woefully inadequate to pay for alternatives.

To continue to give families adequate options, we recommend the following:

- Adjusting the payment-in-lieu amount to 50% of the cost cited by the district for transporting the student, not to exceed \$2,500. This was in the Senate's version of the budget two years ago and would provide the

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- opportunity to find a meaningful alternative to busing while still saving districts money.
- OAIS recommends a statutory limit for declarations of impracticality of two years, after which a district must go through the declaration process again. Population shifts due to massive economic development projects will lead to an influx of new residents, leading to a greater need for transportation to nonpublic schools and more students on buses, thereby decreasing the cost per pupil. Revisiting these decisions regularly may lead to different conclusions on practicality with changes in circumstances.

Other Policy Changes Made by the House: Our organization urges the Senate to consider the following policy changes made by the Senate:

- OAIS supports the increases made to the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship amounts;
- A provision added by the House regarding the forwarding of academic records even when adults owe thousands of dollars in unpaid tuition should be removed;
- The Senate should retain language added by the House that specifies students in chartered nonpublic school students shall receive substantially the same access to pupil transportation as public school students;
- While we support language added by the House to allow districts to transport chartered nonpublic students in vans, when appropriate, we would ask the Senate to require districts consult with the parents of those chartered nonpublic school students before moving forward with that option, and give parents the right to refuse van transportation when bus transportation is practical;
- The House's proposal for a pilot project where an ESC will operate transportation for public and nonpublic students is commendable, but the ESC should not be exempt from penalties for noncompliance and the project should not be funded with federal money (Emergency Assistance to Nonpublic School, or EANS) since it is public school districts, and not chartered nonpublic schools, who will experience cost savings through a successful pilot project;
- When HB 29 was passed to implement sports gaming in Ohio, the bill specifically allocated the money for both public and nonpublic schools. The line item in HB 33 regarding the \$15,000,000 allocated interscholastic athletics and extracurricular activities should specify that both public and chartered nonpublic schools are eligible rather than leaving the discretion to the Department of Education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.