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Sponsor Testimony

Senate Bill 208

Ohio Senate Education Committee

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Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 208, which requires school districts to create an exception in their open enrollment policies for the benefit of military children. In essence, S.B. 208 says that Ohio's public schools must open enroll the student of a military family so long as that school has the capacity for them.

Military families relocate every 2-3 years, which is 10x more often than civilians.¹ These families are often required to move from temporary to permanent housing, or they relocate to a new state after the school year has started, which in turn impacts their children's school enrollment. Some military families can even be required to live in military housing, which restricts them to the schools zoned near their post. Suffice to say, military families frequently have to move for work. We can ease their transitions by ensuring their children have easy access the public education system by being allowed to enroll in any Ohio public school.

Open enrollment is a form of public school choice that allows a student to attend a different school than that which they are assigned based on their place of residence.² Under current law, each city, local, and exempted village school district in Ohio must adopt a resolution establishing an inter-district open enrollment policy that does one of the following³: (1) Entirely prohibits open enrollment, with the exception of students who pay tuition; (2) Permits open enrollment only of students from

¹ <https://counselingcompact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CC-Summit-Slides-2021.pdf>

² R. C. 3313.97

³ R.C. 3313.98(B)(1)

adjacent districts; or (3) Permits open enrollment of students from any other districts.⁴

S.B. 208 creates an exception, applying only to districts that wholly prohibit open enrollment or only accept open enrollment of students from neighboring districts. This exception requires these districts allow a student who is not a “native student”⁵ to open enroll in the district if one or both of the student’s parents are an active duty member of the United States Armed Forces and stationed in Ohio.

To make use of this exception, the student’s parents must furnish a copy of the parent’s official written order verifying the parent’s status as an active duty member.⁶ In open enrolling the student of a military parent, school districts must comply with the same procedures required by law for other open enrollments. It is important to note that the bill also has guardrails prohibiting districts from charging tuition for military children who enroll under the exception.

Military families often find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to school enrollment options due to their military-directed assignments. We can provide military families with stability by passing S.B. 208 and modifying our open enrollment policies in order to improve these families’ schooling options.

I would like to thank the Department of Defense for their support, as well as Shane Preston, Great Lakes Regional Liaison for the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, for bringing this issue to my attention.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

⁴ LSC Bill Analysis of SB 208

⁵ R.C. 3313.98(A)(2) - A “native student” is a student who is entitled under law, generally based on residence in a school district, to attend school in that district.

⁶ Lines 189-191 of S.B. 208