

Senate Bill 304 Proponent Testimony
Ohio Senate Education Committee

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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and committee members, I am pleased to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 304.

I am the administrator of Licking County Christian Academy, a nonchartered school, in Heath located about 30 miles east of here. For over 50 years, LCCA has provided an excellent education for young people. Our graduates serve as pastors, civil servants, educators, doctors, and business leaders. LCCA is a ministry of the Newark Baptist Temple. As such, we are committed to maintaining our status as a nonchartered school. We believe that as a ministry of a church, we should not seek permission from the State in the form of a charter to operate an education ministry. We object to state control of our curriculum and state-licensing mandates for our teachers. While we have certain education-related objections, we respect the State's role in providing for the safety and general welfare of the people. We comply with the State's minimum education standards and health, fire, and safety laws.

I am giving testimony here today in support of the Nonchartered ESA bill because current school choice legislation excludes nonchartered schools. This past summer every family that contacted our school for enrollment information asked if we accepted EdChoice scholarships. Sadly, as a nonchartered school we are excluded from participating in the program. Except for a few families, when they discovered that we did not participate in EdChoice the conversation ended. These parents were not interested in learning more about the education we offer because of the financial disadvantage. While most of our current families reenrolled, several switched schools to use the EdChoice scholarship.

I am grateful for the educational freedom made possible by EdChoice, I believe that competition between schools enhances the quality of education in a community. For low-income families especially, the quality and compatibility of instruction should be the primary area of competition not cost. By excluding nonchartered schools from scholarship opportunities, we inadvertently reduce the availability of educational options available to families. Senate Bill 304 provides a solution to this imbalance.

Now, those that oppose school choice will attack this bill on several fronts. The first is the supposed lack of accountability. The heart of this bill lies in its affirmation of the primary role parents play in their children's education. Education belongs to parents who are best equipped to decide where their children will thrive academically and otherwise. Nonchartered schools are inherently accountable to parents. Unlike public schools, where funding is guaranteed regardless of performance, private schools must earn the trust and satisfaction of the families they serve. This is the highest form of accountability. In addition to parental accountability, the bill includes provisions that would prevent fraudulent use of the program and financial transparency.

A second argument against this bill and similar legislation is that it would create an unfair subsidy for wealthy families. In reality, the cost to taxpayers to educate a “wealthy” child would be less with an ESA scholarship than the cost of educating him at a public school.

A third argument is that school choice drains public schools of resources. However, under the program, public schools would retain local property tax revenues when a student transfers to a nonchartered school. This would result in increased per-pupil funding for public schools, enabling them to serve their remaining students more effectively.

There are many other such arguments used to oppose school choice programs, each of which have answers. There are no good reasons to oppose school choice programs like SB 304.

Senate Bill 304 reflects a commitment to fairness, choice, and quality in education. It helps parents to make better decisions, ensures that taxpayer funds are used effectively, and promotes healthy competition that benefits all schools.

I urge this committee to advance Senate Bill 304 and ensure that all families, regardless of their choice of school, have access to the resources they need to provide their children with an excellent education. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.