



**HB 33 Interested Party Testimony
Eldrich Carr, Marburn Academy
Senate Finance Committee
Chairman Matt Dolan
May 31, 2023**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today as an interested party on HB 33, and to highlight the importance of the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship (JPSNS) and need for an increase to this vital scholarship. My name is Eldrich Carr, and I am the Head of School of Marburn Academy in New Albany, Ohio. However, today I am here representing three schools: Lawrence School serving students and families in Northeast Ohio; Springer School and Center serving students and families in the greater Cincinnati area; and Marburn Academy serving students and families right here in the greater Columbus area. Collectively our schools represent a large cross-section of Ohio as we serve families from approximately 29 counties, 158 cities and townships, and 142 school districts.

Each of our schools operate as a nonprofit, tuition-based private independent day school for students with specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD and other related learning complications that create executive function challenges. In addition to these specific learning disabilities, some of our students may also have a diagnosis of high-functioning autism. It is important to know that prior to enrolling in our schools, these students and their committed families have tried a variety of schools and programs, unfortunately with little success. What makes schools like ours different from other private independent schools is that families come to us **not by choice, but by necessity**.

The Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship is a vital educational scholarship program for families with K–12 students that have special needs. Structured into six categorical levels, each category aligns with varying types of special needs and corresponds to different scholarship values. These categories range from Category 1 which includes speech and language disabilities and is currently valued at \$7,976 up to Category 6 which includes autism spectrum disorders, traumatic brain injuries, and visual and hearing impairments with a scholarship value of \$27,000. Generally speaking, Lawrence School, Springer School and Center, and Marburn Academy primarily serve students in Category 2 which include specific learning disabilities described earlier; this scholarship category is presently valued at \$10,377.

Historically, Category 6 of the JPSNS was equivalent to the value of an Autism Scholarship, but in the last biennial budget the Autism Scholarship value increased from \$27,000 to \$32,445. In that same biennial budget the JPSNS program cap for category 6, which includes autism spectrum disorders, remained at \$27,000. In FY24, we are seeking to restore parity of JPSNS with the Autism Scholarship program and ensure a proportional percentage increase for all six JPSNS special education categories to ensure the value of the scholarship benefits *every category of special needs students*. In FY25 we are seeking an additional 5% increase for Categories 1–5 while maintaining alignment with the Autism Scholarship for Category 6.

We are grateful to the House of Representatives for increasing the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship program cap category 6 to \$30,000 and raising categories 1-5 by roughly 12%. However, we urge the Senate to take another step toward realigning the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship with the Autism Scholarship to support these special needs students and families.

It cannot be overstated how impactful the JPSNS and Autism Scholarship are for families of children with special needs in Ohio. These scholarships give students and families the opportunities to access the necessary specialized resources and learning environments they need to truly reach their potential. We appreciate the support the legislature has provided for the JPSNS and Autism Scholarships in the past and look forward to seeing this continue. Again, our request is to restore parity between the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship and the Autism Scholarship with a commensurate increase carrying through to each category of special needs 1 through 6. We are supportive of additional increases to the Autism Scholarship as well if the General Assembly sees fit. However, our legislative request would be to continue to maintain parity between the Autism Scholarship and Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship with proportionate increases for each of the categories of special needs. By reestablishing and keeping funding parity, you are assisting families of children with special needs in ways that can truly change their child's future.

Chairman Dolan and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of our students, families, and institutions. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.