

Thank you, Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, for hearing my testimony today.

I have previously shared my testimony on why school choice is so important to my family and every family in Ohio. Ohio currently has several Ed Choice and Voucher Program options, yet many families across our state still are not eligible. I am here today to specifically ask that Universal eligibility is made available to all Ohio families and students in this great state. Please fund and provide Universal eligibility for every student, every family, and every community, in the state of Ohio.

Three concerns have been presented to me that I would like to address.

First, what about all the families that live in our rural areas that do not have the availability of a private option? What are they going to do?

When universal eligibility is offered, it opens up the marketplace and creative warehouse. Look at what happened during the pandemic; many parents started co-ops, learning pods, and micro-schools. All of you have heard of it: "If you build it, they will come." Sometimes options do not exist because a monopoly has been prohibiting it. In my case, I had nowhere to send my son once the Peterson Scholarship was passed. I had just spent eight years trying to find options, and now that I had access to the funds, I had nowhere to send him. I wouldn't be stopped now. I searched for a school that would start a program I created, and I was willing to do whatever I could to help make it happen—even closing my business, getting certified, and teaching in the classroom. Parents know their children better than anyone and will get resourceful to meet their needs. Never underestimate a mom on a mission.

Second, what about poor families? How will they pay all the extra costs associated with private education? Would they be passed over for patents with a greater ability to pay? Don't underestimate Ohio parents and private programs.

In the current system, the family has to apply to the school first and get accepted before they apply for the scholarships. No one at the school knew our family's needs when I applied for my family. They knew we were well known in the community with two girls and a son with special needs. In reality, we were a family of five living off an income of less than \$65,000.

Parents need a hand-up, not a hand-out, and then watch what they can do. When my daughters were accepted to the private school through Ed Choice, I had to find a way to earn or get credit to pay the extra \$2500 per daughter, plus uniforms, supplies, sports fees, and other expenses. I got creative, and we had to make hard choices. Using its assistance program, I worked for \$10 an hour at the school. I worked in every area doing things like cafeteria work, sweeping, cleaning, clerical work, mopping the halls and stairwells, and even scrubbing the bleachers in the gymnasium, all while still home-educating my son. My son and I also staffed a used clothing room, mending, washing, sorting, and selling used uniforms to help other families at the school and earn credit. I used their script program and signed up every family and friend I could to use the program to help raise money. We cut coupons, shopped at thrift stores, and sold some items. We cut out every extra that our family had to raise that money. Never

underestimate a mom on a mission. Parents will do what is best when given a helping hand they need, and our family needed that extra \$5000 per student from the voucher. Private schools work harder to make every dollar go farther and often have generous donor and /or scholarship programs to assist needy students. Quality education is one of the best gifts we can give our children and society.

Third, Ohio isn't ready to fund a Universal program; it will bankrupt the system and the budget.

My first answer is that I was told the same thing when asking for support for the Peterson Scholarship, and we still haven't hit the 5% cap on ELIGIBLE students after twelve years of having the Peterson Scholarship.

Secondly, with choice comes responsibility, and many parents do not want the responsibility. There will always be a need for quality public schools. What if you did have a mass exodus in the public system? Wouldn't that show you that the state was funding an education model that wastes taxpayer funds? Would we be worse if we held those doing a poor job accountable? When we spend someone else's money, don't we owe them a good return on their investment? The best return on my investment is what I wanted and expected when my children were in school. When I wasn't getting it, I made hard choices to get the help I needed to ensure the money was being spent in the best way possible for the children. Give parents the option to CHOOSE what is best for their children. If those parents want to take on the responsibility of that choice, let them do it. Our goal is well-educated students. Our goal is not to support a system no matter what. If a public school meets a student's needs, people will not leave; it is too much effort and responsibility. If it is not, the student deserves better. In the end, public and private students succeed.

Finally, choices and options in education are good for everyone; those making the choices and those providing the service. The providers have to fight for the business of the consumer. If not satisfied, the consumer will take their business elsewhere. A monopoly on a service robs the system of quality, and the product cannot reach its full potential. No product is more important than a well-educated mind. I know that the choices we were given as a family helped all three of our children become well-educated, responsible, and contributing members of society. I am grateful for those choices. I stand before you today asking that you give every family in our state the same opportunity by putting Universal Eligibility language into the budget bill.

Thank you again for hearing my testimony, and I welcome any questions you may have.