

Good afternoon, my name is Madison Smith, and I am a parent from Cincinnati.

I am commenting today to express my opposition to the education component of Ohio House Bill 96, which seeks to divert public funds away from our public schools and funnel them into private institutions. This bill, under the guise of school choice, threatens to undermine the very foundation of our public education system and exacerbate inequities in our state.

Public schools are the cornerstone of our communities. They serve all students, regardless of their background, ability, or zip code. They are legally required to accept every child, provide specialized services for students with disabilities, and ensure that no one is turned away. Private schools, on the other hand, are not held to the same standards. They can selectively admit students, exclude those with special needs, and are not accountable to taxpayers in the same way public schools are. By redirecting public funds to private institutions, HB 96 prioritizes the few at the expense of the many.

This bill would further strain the already limited resources of our public schools which in my opinion are being intentionally dismantled by so-called ideologues who claim to believe in the private market. Ohio's public education system has faced years of underfunding, and instead of addressing this critical issue, HB 96 would siphon even more money away from our classrooms, our children. This means fewer teachers, larger class sizes, and fewer resources for the students who need them most. It is unacceptable to ask public schools to do more with less while private schools receive taxpayer dollars without the same level of oversight or accountability.

Proponents of this bill argue that it provides "school choice" for families. But let's be clear: true school choice cannot exist when public schools are systematically defunded and left to struggle. For many families, especially those in rural or low-income areas, private schools are not a viable option. They may be too far away, too expensive, or simply unwilling to accept their child. This bill does not expand choice—it creates a two-tiered system where only some families benefit, while others are left behind.

Moreover, the lack of accountability in how these funds would be used is deeply concerning. Public schools are required to adhere to strict transparency and accountability measures, including state testing, public reporting, and oversight by elected school boards. Private schools, however, are not subject to the same requirements. Taxpayers deserve to know how their money is being spent, and this bill fails to provide that assurance.

Finally, this bill ignores the root causes of educational inequity in our state. Instead of addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate disparities—such as poverty, inadequate funding, and unequal

access to resources—HB 96 simply shifts resources away from the schools that serve the majority of Ohio's children. We should be investing in our public schools, not dismantling them.

I urge you to reject the education component of House Bill 96. Our public schools serve a public good, and they deserve our full support. Let's work together to ensure that every child in Ohio has access to a high-quality education, regardless of where they live or how much money their family makes.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Madison Smith