

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB96.

My name is Christen Holmes Stahl and I reside in Hartford, which is in the Northridge School District. My husband and I have 4 daughters ranging in age from 11 to 2 years old. Both of us attended our local public school from kindergarten through graduation. Both of our oldest daughters have attended public schools. However, public schools have not worked well for our children. Currently, our eldest daughter attends a non-chartered private school, and we are very pleased with her school and our second eldest is homeschooled. We are also pleased with her progress. I will share more about the history of our experiences.

For over the past three years we have been homeschooling, however, last spring we decided our oldest two daughters would benefit from going back to school. We sent our two oldest daughters to a chartered public school in the beginning of this school year. For our oldest daughter, on the outside, it was a triumph, she was excelling. She was doing well academically, she had friends, she was continuing her other activities with success. But, from our viewpoint she was struggling. What others couldn't see was her difficulty in calming down enough for bed to sleep well, despite her 8:30pm bedtime which allowed for ample sleep. She began sleepwalking and was generally anxious. She even had lines under each eye, evidence of her lack of quality sleep. By the end of September, we knew we had to switch schools.

Let me clarify three specific reasons public schools are not the best choice for our oldest daughter. First, just like some parents notice a change in behavior when their child has red dye or too much sugar, I also notice a difference in my oldest child's behavior when she has screen-time. And I have been astonished over the years at how much screen time occurs at the average school. Secondly, she has also always had more energy than the average girl. In fact, as a baby she was constantly moving. Lastly, our oldest daughter is a gifted leader. When we send her to public schools, which are student-led, she sometimes ends up leading the teacher. She told us a story of her gym class this past fall when her gym teacher was so apathetic she took over in giving her classmates direction. Unfortunately, if you have ever known a child to be in control, s/he is an anxious child.

By October, we knew Columbus Classical Academy was where we wanted her to go for at least four reasons. First, they do not use technology needlessly which mitigates some behavioral challenges and allows us to feel okay about limited screen time in our own household. Secondly, at CCA she gets gym class first thing every morning which helps her go to class focused. She also has two recesses, albeit short, but effective in allowing her to use up some of her energy. Thirdly, CCA's policy is teacher-led. With a strong teacher, with whom she has at Columbus Classical Academy, she is able to focus on learning rather than leading. Lastly, CCA puts a strong emphasis on virtues, which aligns with our family values.

Our oldest daughter began attending Columbus Classical Academy at the beginning of November and now we wish she would have begun the school year there. I am happy to report that she is once again sleeping better and is no longer sleepwalking! CCA is a school we feel confident is doing their best by our daughter. She is getting the education she wants and needs in the setting that suits her best and allows her to thrive. In a family system, one member affects the whole family. Therefore, her attendance at Columbus Classical Academy has been great for our whole family, despite the great sacrifices of time driving back and forth daily, coordinating logistics for the whole family, and of course the financial

burden to send her there. Praise God that Columbus Classical Academy was available because we are delighted to be a part of this school.

The unfortunate part to this new school was that it came with a substantial price-tag. Originally, we considered sending both our older girls, but for various reasons, one of which was the price, we decided to once again homeschool our second daughter.

My husband and I have discussed eventually sending our other three girls to Columbus Classical Academy. In fact, school choice and an Education Savings Account would be imperative in our financial ability to send them to our school of choice. In years to come, I hope that we will never be in a situation where we must choose which of our children we can afford to send to the school of our choice. In addition, I urge you to get rid of the means testing.

As for my second oldest daughter, the public school system failed her as well. Last year around this time, she was diagnosed with Dyslexia. She currently has an IEP, but the public school system's way of attending to students with special needs such as Dyslexia is honestly pathetic. Thankfully, at home we can focus on catching her up in phonics and reading, whereas in school she would have never caught up. Yet, each student in a public school receives an astronomical amount of money. How is the public school system failing to such a degree? And why are you and our other elected representatives allowing this to happen?

How many other families are in a similar predicament where the public schools are failing their children? I ask you to think about the countless students in Ohio who could have a similar story to our oldest daughters. Now think about the opportunity you have to make a big difference for students in Ohio by making school choice a reality and providing non-chartered Education Savings Accounts for those students.

Hence, I believe it is imperative that we have school choice in Ohio. If a student does not attend a public school, then the state funds to educate the student should be made available in an ESA to be spent on education such as homeschooling materials, special needs services, or at a non-chartered private school.

Thank you again for the chance to provide testimony on supporting education opportunity for Ohio families in House Bill 96.

Sincerely,  
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