

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

My name is Kevin Larson. My wife, Jessica, and I reside in Westerville with our five children. Currently, our oldest three children attend Columbus Classical Academy which is a non-chartered non-public school. Our other two children are not yet of school age. I'm here today to acknowledge that while school choice was expanded in the last state operating budget cycle through the EdChoice Scholarship Program, there are still a significant number of Ohio families like mine who have been left out.

We chose to send our children to a non-chartered non-public school because we want them to pursue a classical education rooted in truth, goodness, and beauty. The school provides an education that not only imparts knowledge but also helps the students grow in virtue.

My wife and I have witnessed our children's growth in knowledge and virtue both at home and at the school during morning assembly, annual concerts, plays, and other school events. One example I would like to highlight is student recitation that happens during morning assembly. It brings us great joy as parents to watch each of our children confidently reciting from memory various poems, documents, or speeches in front of the entire school body to include teachers, staff, and parents. Some memorable recitations include when our oldest old son recited the opening and closing portions of the Declaration of Independence, when our daughter recited Longfellow's eight-stanza poem, The Village Blacksmith, and when our younger son recited My Shadow by Robert Louis Stevenson. In addition to the challenge of simply memorizing the selections, our children have grown in the virtue of fortitude through the practice of public recitation. This is just one example of the type of education our children are receiving at their school.

While we appreciate the education our children are receiving, sending them to a non-chartered non-public school comes at a cost. To be honest, the financial cost puts a substantial strain on our family finances to the point where we have had to consider other options, especially as our younger children reach school age. The establishment of a non-chartered educational savings account program would help make this type of educational opportunity more affordable not only for my family but for many others.

I urge this Committee to amend HB 96 to include the language from SB 68 on establishing a Non-chartered Educational Savings Account Program to make school choice truly universal in the Buckeye State. Knowing that the state operating budget cycle is the avenue for advancing bold, transformational public policy, I urge the legislature to bring the Non-chartered Education Savings Account Program to fruition during this decisive and impactful process. It would make a world of difference for a significant number of Ohio families.

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