

HB 96 Testimony

Cathi Kulik

Senate Education Committee

May 7, 2025

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, Senator Cutrona, Senator Huffman, Senator Koehler, and Senator Smith

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Cathi Kulik. I am a life-long resident of Ohio, a mother, a grandmother, and a retired Olentangy Local School District teacher. I am a facilitator with Erase the Space, a volunteer with The Big Bus, a volunteer with Sandlot Columbus, and a volunteer with several non-education related organizations. I strongly oppose HB 96 for a number of reasons, but I will confine my comments today to school funding and vouchers.

I support vouchers for low-income students living in under-performing school districts, which was the original intent of the voucher program when it was established in 1996, but it appears that mission has been lost. According to data from the state, 90% of students receiving vouchers are not from low-income families (family of four earning \$64,300). In fact, 17% of students receiving Ed Choice Expansion vouchers this year come from families earning \$200,000 or more annually.

How does this budget hurt public schools? 90% of Ohio students attend public schools, with 10% attending private school. The proposed budget increases funding from the state by \$226 million over the first year of the

budget. Over the same time period, funding for vouchers for private schools increases by \$500 million. 90% of Ohio school children (public school students) receive an increase of \$226 million, while 10% of Ohio school children (private school students) receive an increase of \$500 million. Speaker Huffman and Finance Chair Stewart have said, “the state doesn’t have enough money to fully fund public education.” But it appears the state has plenty of money to fund vouchers for private schools.

School vouchers use has surged in the past year, but private school enrollment has remained largely flat, so my tax dollars are subsidizing families who were already paying tuition to send their children to private schools. In other words, we’re subsidizing families who can afford private school tuition.

Indian Creek is a school district in the Steubenville area. T. C. Chappellear, the Superintendent, says that, prior to last year, voucher recipients in his district were low-income students. This year, there has been a 154% increase in vouchers, but public school enrollment has not changed. “The students who take vouchers in our district are disproportionately NOT from low income families. I think that kind of flies in the face of the voucher mantra of saving poor students from failing schools.” The increase in voucher use without an increase in private school enrollment has been the story throughout the state.

A number of arguments can be made for who is being hurt most by this budget, but I found another statistic that I thought was interesting. 92% of urban students have a private school within five miles of home. 34% of rural students have a private school within five miles of their homes, so the students with the most limited choices are those who live in rural areas. In 65 counties in Ohio, more than 90% of the county area is considered rural. This budget hurts both low-income and rural students.

I've always believed the purpose of government is to help people who need help. This budget fails to achieve that goal.

I'm happy to answer questions.