

**HB 96 Interested Party Testimony**  
**Holly Denson**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Chairman Andrew Brenner**  
**May 14, 2025**

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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on HB 96, and to highlight the significance of the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship (JPSNS) and respectfully request an increase to this essential scholarship. My name is Holly Denson and I am the proud mother of Elijah, my son, who is impacted by learning disabilities. In addition to representing our family and parents of Marburn Academy students, I represent all the parents in Ohio who are doing their very best to support their children who learn differently.

Up until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, Elijah's schooling experience was less than ideal. It seemed, at every turn, Elijah was having academic struggles and not reaching his full potential due to dyslexia. We tried taking the traditional steps, such as more plans and supports at school, even garnering an ETR and IEP from the district. These steps didn't make a significant impact, though. Elijah still wasn't learning or thriving. Elijah was quickly becoming a statistic no one can be proud of, a student lost in an educational system that is too vast and broad to serve the specialized needs of some children. I was a parent with too few options, too little hope, and too much at stake to give up. That's when we found out about Ohio's Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship and Marburn Academy.

In the 2020-2021 school year, with Elijah entering 4<sup>th</sup> grade, we made the choice to change schools, a choice eased by the very best of Ohio's generous spirit and the state's understanding that every student is the cornerstone of our future.

Being accepted into Marburn because of the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship is life changing. Marburn's specialized education program for kids with learning differences is expensive, but their specialization and expertise has changed Elijah's life. The small class sizes and access to education specialists tailored to his specific needs and learning differences is critical to Elijah's learning process. Marburn provides a safe, confidence-building, hopeful community that knows my child, not just as a learner, but as a person. This expertise and empathy, level of understanding, and proven success has helped Elijah become a person I am proud of and all of Ohio can be proud of as well.

The Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship is more than dollars and cents. It is a lifeline to parents in Ohio who know the potential of our sons and daughters to be productive citizens and workers in our communities, but need an alternative learning environment to do so. Without these vital resources (as well as the financial aid from Marburn and our family's personal sacrifices), schools like Marburn may be out of reach and children may not be able to receive the fundamental skills they need to overcome their learning differences.

Said in simple terms, without the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship, it will be more difficult than ever for Ohio's children to achieve success in school and life. Our family and families like ours around the state of Ohio are incredibly grateful for any additional support you can provide through the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship – this program changes lives. It changed ours.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of our family and to share why an increase to the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship is important to us. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.