



**Senate Finance Committee
Substitute House Bill 96
Lannie Davis-Frecker, President & CEO, Julie Billiard Schools
May 14, 2025**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute House Bill 96. My name is Lannie Davis-Frecker, and I am the President and CEO of Julie Billiard Schools, a network of private, nonprofit schools with campuses in Lyndhurst, Akron, Westlake, and Brecksville. We have been serving students with special learning needs for 70 years and in the past 10 years we have grown to multiple campuses because the need is great, and our services provide a unique model and approach to learning for this student. Even with growth, we obtain a substantial waitlist.

At Julie Billiard Schools, we serve students with learning challenges by fostering self-confidence, inspiring Christian values, and equipping kindergarten through eighth-grade students with the skills and enthusiasm for lifelong learning. Our holistic approach addresses academic, social, spiritual, and emotional development, with onsite therapies including speech, occupational therapy, behavioral support, art therapy, and music therapy. All of our teachers are licensed intervention specialists and our teacher to student ratio is 6 to 1 and 8 to 1 in the upper grades. Each student benefits from a tailored learning program that meets their unique needs, helping them succeed. We emphasize creating a sense of belonging, building relationships, and collaborating with families to ensure continuity and support.

We are encouraged that the House budget includes an increase to the Autism and Jon Peterson Special Needs (JPSN) Scholarships – from \$32,445 to \$34,000. However, to truly meet the growing and complex needs of students and sustain high-quality programming, we urge the Senate to build upon this progress. **We are asking for your support of an amendment that would raise the scholarship amounts to \$36,000 in FY 2026 and \$37,000 in FY 2027, with annual cost-of-living adjustments moving forward.**

Currently, the average JPSN parent – who makes up about 30% of our population – pays over \$6,000 annually for Julie Billiard. For our Autism Scholarship families, who represent 70% of our student body, the gap between the scholarship amount and the actual cost of services was \$3,000 this year alone. Without a meaningful increase in funding, many families may find their options limited. These scholarships are designed to give parents the freedom to choose the educational environment that best supports their child's unique needs. While public schools work hard to serve all students, they are often under-resourced and not equipped to provide the highly individualized services our students require – leading to challenges like larger class sizes, less specialized instruction, and inconsistent support.

In the last budget cycle, there was no increase to the Autism Scholarship despite the fact that the demand for services continues to rise. Families are facing growing needs and higher costs, yet funding has remained stagnant. It is important to note that even with these limited resources, the total amount provided through the Autism Scholarship remains significantly less than what public schools typically spend to educate children with comparable needs. This disparity places an undue burden on families and providers striving to deliver essential, individualized support.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. This funding would have a direct and meaningful impact on children who depend on these resources to access an education that meets their individual needs – paving the way for their long-term success.