



Senate Education Committee

Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 96

May 14, 2025

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 96.

My name is Frank O'Linn, and I serve as the Superintendent of Schools for the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, which serves nearly 40,000 students in 108 Catholic schools across 8 counties of Northeast Ohio. I am here today with deep gratitude for the legislature's ongoing support of parental school choice in – support that has allowed Ohio families, regardless of income or ZIP code, to access schools that best meet the needs of their children. We have seen enrollment growth the last 4 consecutive years, this year growing in preschool, elementary, and high school simultaneously.

Today, our Catholic schools are more diverse than ever – racially, religiously, socioeconomically, and in terms of learning needs. That diversity is both a strength and a responsibility we carry with tremendous care.

In that spirit, I appreciate the opportunity to offer context and support for the proposal to extend **Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid (DPIA) to qualifying students attending chartered nonpublic schools**, as outlined today by my colleague Tom Rhatican of the Catholic Conference of Ohio.

In addition to leading the largely site-based system, the Diocese directly operates 9 schools of its own, 5 diverse high schools and 4 urban elementary schools, which can help illuminate the need and opportunity.

First, consider our four diocesan elementary schools in Cleveland – Archbishop Lyke, Metro Catholic, St. Francis, and St. Thomas Aquinas – operated in partnership with the nationally recognized Partnership Schools network. Together, these schools educate nearly 1,000 students. Students are representative of their local communities demographically: the students are 71% Black, 21% Hispanic, nearly 100% from low-income households, and predominantly non-Catholic.

These are high-need, high-potential learners. The cost to educate each student exceeds \$10,000 annually, while nearly all families receive the full value of the EdChoice or Cleveland Scholarship – currently \$6,166 for K–8 students. Parents pay no tuition beyond the scholarship, leaving a nearly \$4,000 per-pupil gap that schools must fundraise each year to sustain quality instruction, wraparound supports, and enrichment. Funding the gap is a part of our mission, but it is increasingly challenging.

These schools are delivering real academic growth, exceeding the proficiency results of nearby public options which, by comparison, received to more than \$26,000 per pupil last year, with just over \$10,000 delivered from the state formula, including DPIA.

Families who chose Catholic schools are just as needing of the supports DPIA was intended to provide: academic intervention, school safety, before and after school care, including high-dosage tutoring and mentoring, and services for students experiencing homelessness.

In Cleveland and places like it, we see significant frequent movement among schools – public, charter, and nonpublic. These are not “the district’s students” nor “the Church’s students,” they are simply our students, exemplifying the proverb that, “it takes a village to raise a child.” Extending DPIA would enable chartered nonpublic schools such as our Catholic schools to enhance the much-needed resources and services they provide to young people most in need.

Such challenges are not unique to the inner city, as the case of one of our high schools illustrates.

Elyria Catholic High School is the only Catholic high school in Lorain County, and it serves families from urban, suburban and rural communities in multiple counties. It has been a model of both efficiency and growth over the past five years, as enrollment has increased from 420 to 520 students – nearly full capacity – enabling strong economies of scale. Tuition remains at \$10,900, among the lowest in our region, while the actual cost to educate per student is just under \$15,000.

Importantly, the number of low-income students has grown substantially – from 38 students (9%) in FY2020 to 132 students (25%) today. As a result, the total scholarship funding gap has grown from \$98,800 in FY2020 to over \$329,000 this year.

Some recent testimony has painted a picture of state scholarship use that distorts this reality. These are not elite or exclusionary institutions. They are accessible, accountable, and deeply committed to student success. All our chartered nonpublic schools follow Ohio’s Learning Standards, graduation requirements, and testing mandates. All teachers are state-certified. And

all schools are subject to announced and unannounced ODEW site visits – important, longstanding accountability measures.

While the proposal to extend DPIA to chartered nonpublic school students would not close the entire funding gap, it would provide meaningful, targeted support for eligible students and the critical services DPIA is intended to fund. I urge your serious consideration of this proposal as a way to provide more equitable support to disadvantaged students, regardless of the type of school they attend.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.