

Chair, members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Paul Palomba, I am the President of the Canton Professional Educators' Association and former co-chair of the Ohio 8 Coalition. I come today not only as a concerned citizen but as someone genuinely frustrated by the persistent and, frankly, cynical practice of embedding private school voucher programs into sweeping budget bills—rather than putting them before the public or through a standalone legislative process.

Let's call it what it is: a maneuver to avoid transparency and public accountability.

If these voucher programs are truly the shining solution some claim they are, then why not present them openly? Why not let them stand on their own merit?

Instead, what we get is a quiet line item slipped into a 4,000-page budget package—nestled between highway funding and nursing home reimbursements—so that the vast majority of Ohioans never see it coming.

And here's the disconnect: 90 percent of Ohio students attend public schools. Only about 10 percent attend private or charter institutions. Yet we're funneling increasing amounts of public dollars to subsidize a parallel education system—often without the same transparency, accountability, or obligation to serve all students.

Meanwhile, our public schools—where nearly every Ohioan's child, grandchild, niece or nephew is learning—are asked to do more with less. They're still dealing with aging buildings, staff shortages, and the burden of unfunded mandates. And yet, somehow, we're finding hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to subsidize tuition at institutions that can pick and choose who they accept.

This isn't about "school choice." This is about political expediency—where voucher policies too unpopular to pass on their own are jammed into budget bills that must pass to keep the lights on.

When these ideas are brought directly to voters, they lose. Repeatedly. In state after state.

**Last year in Kentucky, Donald Trump won every single county—120 to nothing—carried by 65 percent of the vote. By an identical margin of 120 to nothing, every county in the state rejected publicly funded private vouchers.** Similar results occurred in Colorado and Nebraska the same year, where voters across political lines repealed or rejected efforts to divert public tax dollars to private education.

Because the public sees through the shiny language of "empowerment" and recognizes what this really is: a quiet re-routing of public money to private interests.

Ohio deserves better. Our children deserve better. And our legislative process deserves more integrity than this.

I urge this committee to demand open debate, separate votes, and true public engagement when it comes to the future of public education. If the policy is strong, it should be able to stand alone.

Thank you.

Paul Palomba

