

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 68, which would establish the Non-chartered Educational Savings Account Program in Ohio.

My name is Christen Holmes Stahl and I reside in Hartford. I'm here today to acknowledge that while school choice was expanded in a previous state operating budget cycle through the EdChoice Scholarship Program, there are still a significant amount of Ohio families who have been left out. My family is one of them.

My husband and I have 4 daughters ranging in age from 11 to 2 years old. For over the past three years we have been homeschooling, however, last spring we decided our oldest two daughters would benefit from going back to school.

We sent our two oldest daughters to a public school in the beginning of this school year. For our oldest daughter, on the outside, it was a triumph, she was excelling. She was doing well academically, she had friends, she was continuing her other activities with success. But, from our viewpoint she was struggling. What others couldn't see was her difficulty in calming down enough for bed to sleep well, despite her 8:30pm bedtime which allowed for ample sleep. She began sleep walking, and was generally anxious. She even had lines under each eye, evidence of her lack of quality sleep. By the end of September, we knew we had to switch schools.

Let me clarify three specific reasons public schools are not the best choice for our oldest daughter. First, just like some parents notice a change in behavior when their child has red dye or too much sugar, I also notice a difference in my oldest child's behavior when she has screen-time. And I have been astonished over the years at how much screen time occurs at the average school. Secondly, she has also always had more energy than the average girl. In fact, as a baby she was constantly moving, for which my mother gave her a nickname. Lastly, our oldest daughter is a gifted leader. When we send her to public schools, which are considered to be student-led, she sometimes ends up leading the teacher. She actually told us a story of her gym class this past fall when her gym teacher was so apathetic she took over in giving her classmates direction. Unfortunately, if you have ever known a child to be in control, s/he is an anxious child.

By October, we knew Columbus Classical Academy was where we wanted her to go for at least four reasons. First, they do not use technology needlessly which mitigates some behavioral challenges and allows us to feel okay about limited screen time in our own household. Secondly, at CCA she gets gym class first thing every morning which helps her go to class focused. She also has two recesses, albeit short, but effective in allowing her to use up some of her energy. Thirdly, CCA's policy is teacher-led. With a strong teacher, with whom she has at Columbus Classical Academy, she is able to focus on learning rather than leading. Lastly, CCA puts a strong emphasis on virtues, which aligns with our family values.

The unfortunate part to this new school was that it came with a substantial price-tag. Originally, we considered sending both our older girls, but for various reasons, one of which was the price, we decided to once again homeschool our second daughter.

Our oldest daughter began attending Columbus Classical Academy at the beginning of November and now we wish she would have begun the school year there. I am happy to report that she is once again sleeping better and is no longer sleep walking! CCA is a school we feel confident is doing their best by our daughter. She is getting the education she wants and needs in the setting that suits her best and allows her to thrive. In a family system, one member affects the whole family. Therefore, her attendance at Columbus Classical Academy has been wonderful for our whole family. Praise God that Columbus Classical Academy was available because we are delighted to be a part of this school.

My husband and I have discussed eventually sending our other three girls to Columbus Classical Academy. This Non-Chartered Education Savings Account Program would allow that to happen. In fact, that money would be imperative in our financial ability to send them to our school of choice. In years to come, I hope that we will never be in a situation where we have to choose which of our children we can afford to send to the school of our choice.

How many other families are in a similar predicament? I ask you to think about the countless students around the country who could have a similar story as our oldest daughter. They seem to be succeeding in school, yet they are physically exhausted and anxious. Now think about the opportunity you have to make a big difference for students in Ohio by passing this bill. Those children who could greatly benefit by a school that teaches virtues, is teacher-led, technology-less, and provides more play time than other schools. That school would most likely be a non-chartered non-public school. Think about the success they could have if they had school choice. Today, you have the unequivocal capacity to grant school choice to families who need an option like Columbus Classical Academy, but currently cannot afford it.

Hence, I urge the Committee to favorably report Senate Bill 68 to make school choice truly universal in the Buckeye State. Knowing that the state operating budget cycle is the avenue for advancing bold, transformational public policy, I urge the legislature to bring the Non-chartered Education Savings Account Program to fruition during this decisive and impactful process. It would make a world of difference for a significant amount of Ohio families, including mine.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 68. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

Sincerely,  
Christen Holmes Stahl  
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