

Michael Dankert
5559 Covington Meadows CT
Westerville, OH 43082

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 Michael Dankert and I reside in Westerville. I'm here today to acknowledge that while school choice was expanded in the last state operating budget cycle through the EdChoice Scholarship Program, there is still a significant number of Ohio families who have been left out. My family is one of them.

My daughter Skylar is in 6th grade and this is her first year attending Columbus Classical Academy. We chose this option after being selected to enroll because we wanted our child's educational institution to instill in her a love of classical virtues such as *fortitude, prudence, justice, temperance, faith, hope* and *charity*—the same virtues extolled in the fraternal community service organization that my family has been involved with for many years. We wanted to instill in her an acute love of country—and the Columbus Classical “Patriots” appeared to fit that bill. And, despite our modest means, we wanted Skylar to have a truly excellent education; one that would inculcate a curiosity and love of learning & achievement that would continue throughout her academic career and last a lifetime.

We had no *particular* complaints about the education Skylar was receiving in public schools. Indeed, it seemed “good enough.” But we knew Skylar was capable of much more, able to take on bigger challenges than she was being presented with. The curriculum is tough—several hours of homework a day and the occasional grumble or complaint that comes with it. But at dinner time, we now talk about Enlightenment thinkers, the French Revolution, the astronomical characteristics of the stars and planets and the (sometimes frustrating) variety of Latin verb declensions. Skylar is now getting a top-notch education, where she comes home daily and teaches *me* something I did not know. This is markedly different than our experience with public school, despite its great utility and value.

As I mentioned, we are, nevertheless, a family of modest means. Deciding to send our daughter to a non-chartered, non-public school took much deliberation and accounting of our available finances. It seemed somewhat foolhardy—paying additional tuition for a primary-level education, when our tax dollars were already going to “free” public schools. But for the reasons already given, we knew it was the right choice. Financially, though, it remains a challenge. Many families like ours are still working their way out of the financial doldrums of the last five years and the inflation that has accompanied them.

I, like you, work in service of the Great State of Ohio. Last year, I took a job with the Ohio Department of Commerce at a 40% reduction in pay from my previous private-sector job. I took it because it seemed like a great opportunity to once again serve the state—as I did for

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five years as an officer in the Ohio Military Reserve—and to reap the satisfaction and rewards that came with it. But my pay is still very modest, and, with the recent “return to office” executive order, conservative estimates show an additional 24% of my annual salary will now go to expenses related to full-time commuting. This is where the Education Savings Account Program will be a lifesaver for our family. We will, without a doubt, need the benefit of this program to continue providing the very best education to Skylar; the alternative will be to re-enroll her in a local academic program that is just “good enough.”

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 number of Ohio families.

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