

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 Kristen Penley and I reside in Delaware, Ohio. 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 are still a significant number of Ohio families who have been left out. My family is one of them.

We currently have a high schooler attending Hayes High School in Delaware and two children in upper elementary to middle school grades at Columbus Classical Academy. As a former public school teacher and with my husband still teaching in the public school system, we've seen the educational landscape from multiple perspectives. Our children have experienced public school, chartered private school, and now, a non-chartered private school. We chose Columbus Classical Academy because, over time, we've witnessed firsthand the decline of public education in both academic rigor and its ability to teach students how to be virtuous members of society. Unfortunately, chartered private schools didn't meet our expectations either.

Two school years ago, one of our daughters came home with excellent grades, an A in math to be specific. I assumed this meant she was mastering the concepts being taught. But when we received her results from the Ohio State Test, I was shocked—she failed the math section. I was left wondering if she was just a poor test-taker or if she truly hadn't grasped the material. The following year, we decided to homeschool her, and it became clear very quickly that she had not learned the math she needed. We had a lot of ground to make up. The school had advanced her without equipping her with the skills required for success in the following grade, all while telling us she had not only understood the material but had excelled. If an A means mastery, then students earning D's must be struggling far more than we thought.

Since attending Columbus Classical Academy, both of my children have experienced a transformation. They'll tell you that this is the best school they've ever attended. They feel like they're truly learning and that their work matters. They know they're being held accountable, and grades now reflect real achievement. The school emphasizes virtue daily, and students are held accountable for their actions—no excuses, just responsibility. It's a refreshing change, and we are so grateful for the positive impact this school has had on our children's education and character development.

A Non-chartered Education Savings Account program would provide much-needed stability for my children's education. As a family that cannot afford tuition on our own

and relies on scholarships that may not be available from year to year, we constantly worry that the educational experience we value—and that our children love—could no longer be an option for us. This uncertainty creates significant stress and anxiety, as we navigate the challenges of securing both our children's education and our family's financial well-being.

I strongly urge the Committee to favorably report Senate Bill 68, advancing school choice to make it truly universal across the Buckeye State. Understanding that the state's operating budget cycle is a critical avenue for enacting bold, transformative public policy, I encourage the legislature to prioritize the Non-chartered Education Savings Account Program during this pivotal process. Its implementation would have a profound, positive impact on countless Ohio families, offering them the educational opportunities they deserve.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 68.

Kristen Penley