

Testimony in Support of SB68 (136th GA)

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks, my District 12 Senator Manchester, and other distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee, **thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 68.**

My name is Keith Hamblen, I live in Lima, and serve as the Pastor of Calvary Bible Church and Superintendent of its school the Lima Christian Academy. I also serve as the Executive Director of the Buckeye Christian School Organization (BCSO), a group of sixteen nonchartered, nonpublic schools established in 1985. I have represented the nonchartered schools in Ohio on the Ohio Department of Education's Superintendent's Non-Public Superintendent's Advisory Council (NPA) since that council's inception under then State Superintendent Ted Sanders (1991-1995). On that council, I have spoken on behalf of all the nonchartered schools and not just the ones in our BCSO organization. The other members of the NPA are all chartered schools.

Our nonchartered schools have worked well together for years with the Department of Education (now DEW), the Board of Education, and members of the General Assembly, and members of these bodies know me and will support that claim. Our schools are able to be chartered by the state, but they have continued to be nonchartered because of the belief that this position best reflects the proper relationship between education and the state. People whose children attend nonchartered schools and the people operating nonchartered schools typically are not in higher income brackets; there are exceptions, but they choose to have their children enrolled in schools that believe in this "separation of church and state" enough to sacrifice to continue in it, even with significant financial strain. I agree with those who say that it is appropriate for education dollars to go where it is in the best interest of the child, and believe that parents have the primary responsibility to make this determination.

Those who educate for truly held religious beliefs believe that it is not appropriate to ask permission of (be licensed or chartered by) the state to educate their children. They are willing to notify the state but not to ask permission. The two nonnegotiables are teacher qualifications and curriculum (content, testing). It is for the church ("religious body") and parents to be determiners in these two areas.

SB68 respects this need and is consistent with the underlying thinking for nonchartered schools. We do ask that one clarification be made to avoid possible future confusion, on line 285, adding "as defined by RC 3301.0732" after "minimum education standards."

Not only have these schools provided the personal and smaller-setting attention needed by many in our communities, but these schools also have a proven track record of academic quality. SB68 would fill the hole existing in providing universal school choice in our state. Please support SB68.

Thank you,
Pastor Keith Hamblen
February 25, 2025