

Dear Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson,

Thank you for considering my written testimony urging you to remove the “Educational Savings Account” language from the state’s budget.

I oppose the voucher plan in Ohio for many reasons. Not only does it drain money from public schools, but it is unconstitutional. Taxpayer money must go to public schools, which must be open to everyone, including those who might be difficult to educate. Public schools have elected school boards, which helps to ensure accountability.

In contrast, private and charter schools are able to operate – now with an increased amount of (unconstitutional) public funding – with little to no accountability.

However, as misguided and blatantly unconstitutional as the voucher system in Ohio is, allowing parents to use tax money for Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs) is even more problematic.

Universal vouchers have already diverted nearly \$1 billion from Ohio public schools, which means the state’s budget will experience a \$2.75 billion shortfall over the next two years. ESAs will remove even MORE much-needed money from public schools. ESA accounts are broader and even less regulated than universal vouchers because the account money does not go directly to schools to cover tuition, as vouchers do, but provides money that parents can spend on anything vaguely education-related. Further, the program is not income-tested, so providing funds for ESAs does not benefit financially disadvantaged students in the worst schools.

As for accountability, studies show that, after traditional voucher plans are expanded, pop-up providers flood the market with new private schools. See <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/psj.12164>. Also see <https://www.abc15.com/news/local-news/as-esa-expands-more-private-schools-pop-up-across-arizona>.

And what’s to stop existing private schools from raising tuition? See <https://iowastartingline.com/2023/05/12/kim-reynolds-private-school-voucher-plan-led-to-tuition-hikes/>.

Is there anything to be gained in student performance with an ESA-enhanced voucher plan? Research on Milwaukee’s program found that, not only did about 20% of students leave the program each year, but former voucher students improved in their academic performance once they returned to public schools. See <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0002831211424313> and <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0162373712461852>.

I hope and trust that we can learn from other states about the serious shortcomings of expanded voucher programs and ESAs. If not, perhaps our legislators will recall the ECOT scandal, and the fact that ECOT still owes Ohio taxpayers \$117 million.

I urge you not to make Ohio's voucher program even LESS accountable to the public. Please respect our taxpayers and remove the "Educational Savings Account" language from Ohio's budget bill.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Deborah Cooper