



# OHIO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NETWORK

*A Network of Center for Christian Virtue*

## **HB96 Interested Party Testimony**

### **Senate Finance Committee**

**Troy McIntosh, Executive Director**

**May 27, 2025**

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Good afternoon Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Troy McIntosh and I serve as Executive Director of the Ohio Christian Education Network representing over 200 Evangelical and Catholic schools across the state.

You nearing the end of the difficult process of allocating the substantial resources within the state's budget to most effectively serve the individual and collective needs of Ohio's students. While we believe the current budget bill has done a very good job of doing this, there are a number of items that we encourage the Senate either to keep or to make minor, but important, revisions.

1. We strongly recommend that the Senate keep the House provision establishing a Educational Savings Account for students attending non-chartered schools. I have testified previously before this committee on the benefit of this program that would allow for a wider set of schooling options for Ohio students. There are currently about 50 non-chartered schools that students could use their ESA funds to attend. These are excellent high-quality schools that Ohio has an interest in providing as an option to its students. This program would allow all Ohio parents to serve as a true accountability measure for quality schools. The superintendent of Memphis City C SD illustrates this after Tennessee recently established an ESA program. He announced they will be strengthening its offering in career readiness through partnerships with major employers like xAI, Nike, and Amazon. "I don't want people to choose vouchers. I want them to choose Memphis-Shelby County Schools. If we can create better experiences for the child and parents, I think we will see more families choosing to stay with Memphis Shelby County Schools." We recommend you retain this provision for the benefit of every student in Ohio.
2. The requirement that schools adopt a policy prohibiting student use of cell phones during the school day is one of the best policies the state could take up. The devastating effects of cell phone use on student academic performance, mental health, and social interactions is well documented in research such as Dr. Jonathan Haidt's, [The Anxious Generation](#). And while the current version of this provision, as well as the provisions in SB158, are a good first step, there are a few small changes the Senate could make in a single amendment that would make the policy far more effective.
  - a. Expand the prohibition to any personal device that has internet capability, such as a smart watch. A student without a phone but with a device such as a smart watch will be just as distractible as with a phone.
  - b. Clarify that the prohibition is to encompass the entire school day and not just during the "instructional" day, which could be interpreted as just during class periods. To



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gain the full benefit of the bill, the prohibition must include passing periods, lunch periods, and study halls.

- c. Require that the phone be kept during the school day in a space inaccessible to students. Allowing them to be kept in book bags or even pockets will not remove the mental distraction and will not reap the benefits the policy would otherwise provide.

These changes have been endorsed by Dr. Haidt. An amendment making these changes has been drafted.

3. We endorse the provisions related to the sale of unused school facilities. However, the requirement inserted in the House that if a community school or non-public school ever sells a building purchased under this provision reimburse the public district for the difference between the purchase price and the sale price presents significant problems that I don't believe were intended.
  - a. If a nonpublic school purchases a facility for \$1 million and puts \$3M toward improvements and sells the building 5 years later for \$4 million, should the nonpublic school really be required to give back to the public district \$3 million?
  - b. If a non-public school purchases a building for \$1 million next year, but then sells the building 25 years later for \$5 million, should they really be required to pay back the \$4 million that accrued just in appreciation?

We recommend this unnecessary provision be eliminated and an amendment to do that has been submitted.

4. The current regulations for chartering new non-public schools were written prior to EdChoice and present unnecessary barriers to opening new schools by restricting students' eligibility for an EdChoice Scholarship until several months into the school year. A solution to this is found in a submitted amendment that would allow students to be eligible for an EdChoice Scholarship to any school that has submitted a complete application for chartering, even if their site inspection does not take place until after the school year begins. This will allow the student to receive the entire amount of his or her scholarship for the year.

Thank you for your work on the biennial budget and your consideration of the small but significant proposals. I am available for any questions.