

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.

I am not paid by anyone to advocate for school choice. I strongly believe in the opportunities it unlocks for our young people as well as the potential for improved educational outcomes. I am a parent of two young kids – who took leave to be here today. Why, because a productive and comprehensive education is the best thing we can provide to our children (and to Ohio). Today, Ohio families are trapped by economics from seeking a better education.

Ohio needs to take a leading role in making change happen in this country. It's time to lead our state to a brighter future.

Currently, school choice in Ohio has restrictive limits, on both who qualifies for aid along with what type of school can accept the aid. You already know that higher household income does not mean more disposable income. If you own a home, you have more expenses and in general, those living expenses have gone up significantly in the past 4+ years. So any discretionary income families may have can quickly vanish as life events present curve balls to a family's budget. If there are limitations on who can use the aid or where it can be used, then it's not universal. Ohio needs authentic "universal school choice" but not with all its limitations and restrictions.

Opposition to school choice ESAs want to add constraining measures of oversight, let's go down that path for just a minute (although I'm sure you all have heard the stats).

- 32% Ohio 4th and 8th Graders are proficient in reading. (Nationsreportcard.gov) inversely, 2/3rd of Ohio students are not able to read at their appropriate grade level. Ohio's and national stats are screaming at us that today's education system along with their accountability protocols are failing.
- Competition builds accountability. ESAs would allow for a free market of educational options. If a restaurant isn't providing good food or service, patrons dine elsewhere. If a school isn't meeting the needs of a student, they should be free to study elsewhere and not limited by zip code or state charter.

I would argue that this is not an issue of Ohio not spending enough money on education. It's a matter of the entitlement by those who believe the whole pie (no matter the size) should only go to them and that they are the sole education mechanism in Ohio. Public schools are an important piece, but they should not control who gets what piece of the pie. Ohio families should decide how their children are best served.

It's also a lack of trust in parents. In some cases, the same families who qualify for the ed choice voucher also qualify for SNAP aid. We don't tell those families where to buy their groceries.

They can pick Kroger, or Target, or Dave's Market so what makes it ok to tell them where to educate their children? We trust them to make good decisions to fuel their bodies but not to fuel their children's minds?

The solution is the proper logistical distribution of funds and trust in parents to know what's best for their individual child.

Our country and our state need to inspire and grow the next generation of American innovators. We need our students to be challenged today so that tomorrow they can be the next Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, or Henry Ford and play a major role creating a positive impact on Ohio's future. Education is the path to innovation. As Plutarch the Greek philosopher said, "the mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled."

Accountability of both private and public schools will come naturally with competition and as a rising tide lifts all boats, so will school choice. All Ohio students will benefit from more education options being available in our State. And if you truly believe in school choice, there should not be limits on any available educational options so that families can make the best choice for their children. I strongly urge you to act courageously and move our great state forward with an ESA option for families' educational needs.

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