

May 2, 2016

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Coley, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee, I am here to express my support for Senate Bill 298.

My name is Elizabeth Olden Stillgess and I was raised in Urbana, Ohio. I am an Aboriginal Native American of Moorish Descent, Hebrew Israelite. Growing up in small town, I was blinded by the realities of the real world. Once, I was old enough I decided to leave Urbana. I have lived in Springfield, Columbus and currently reside in Dayton, Ohio. I am a divorced mother of two beautiful and intelligent teenagers. My children have always had A's and B's throughout their previous school years. That is until, I enrolled them into ECOT, an online school.

When we moved Dayton, I enrolled them into Dayton Public Schools. We lived close to an Apartment Complex, known as the Bass, which one would consider a housing project. I worked during the day. The children had to walk home from school. Transportation is not provided, unless you live 2 miles or more from the school. The first day I took them to school I was taken aback. It was if I was reliving the 60's. Out of all the cities I've lived, Dayton Public School District, is the most segregated district that I have been exposed too. There is definitely a vast difference between urban schools and the suburban school districts. My children were having issues while walking home from school. At that point I decided to enroll them into ECOT. I had done a lot of investigating between various schools. Upon reviewing the information from the videos, to the reviews from past and current students, I felt that ECOT was the best choice.

Once enrolled in ECOT; I had trouble from the start. There were always technical issues, as far as logging in and uploading their homework into the electronic drop box. I was constantly on the phone with technical support. Then when I had questions regarding homework on logging into class I would never be able to speak to an actual teacher. I would leave voice mails but most of my calls were never returned. Needless to say, my children failed 7th and 5th grade. I was devastated!

I believe that if Senate Bill 298 was already law, ECOT would have returned my calls and done more to make sure my kids did well in school. There is no doubt in my mind that online schools like ECOT need to be held more accountable and this bill would do that.

After my experience with ECOT, I moved across town and re enrolled my children into Dayton Public. They were once again succeeding and flourishing.

Two years went by and then we moved again to another part of town. I could've kept them enrolled but the school that my children were attending were in the transition of removing grades 7 and 8 from the building. My daughter was ready for High School and son for Junior High. I once again withdrew them from Dayton Public and enrolled them into a successful college prep charter school. The school year started off with a bang. Then second quarter my daughter was having medical issues. She tried to talk me into e schooling again. However, I was adamant and refused to buckle. We tried this once and it was not successful. She was upset of course. Then after the health issues, missing school, it threw her behind once again. To keep from failing I had no choice but to withdrawal her and my son and enroll them into another E school. I was not happy and felt as if I was losing control over my children's education and future.

They are currently enrolled in Insight School of Ohio. Once again, I'm receiving pre-recorded voice mails. However, once I try to return a call I can never speak to a person. They have returned my call once and I missed it. I have received a letter that my kids aren't logging in and will be considered truant. Why wait 10 days before sending a letter or contacting me? I know for a fact that I log into verify that they attended school that day. I have tried to reach out to speak with someone without avail. Once again, I'm at work in the morning while they are home at school. I am completely aware that not all students are capable of successfully completing online school. I am against E schools unless it's needed in case of an emergency. I would never recommend that any child be educated on a continual basis from an online school. At the end of this school year I will be re enrolling my children to Dayton Public Schools, unless I move to the suburbs.

Through this whole process, I have lost faith in the education system as a whole. They are failing our children! From my experience it clearly reflects that they more concerned about the bottom dollar, than educating our children! History continues to prove this to this present day. The schools will send a letter, informing you of the importance of your child being present, during the week they determine funding. Each school is allocated a certain amount per student. It is unfairly dispersed among the all the schools in each of the counties. All Children regardless of race or economic status deserve a fair educational opportunity. Then, upon graduating high school, we go into financial debt to obtain an education, which in return, hopefully get employed in the field of study, to pay off that debt acquired in the first place. We should be able to receive a quality education at no expense! Information is free!

I have never spoken to a committee like this before in my life. But, I felt I needed to speak out so other families don't have go through what my family has experienced. Online charter schools need to be held accountable and that's why I support Senate Bill 298.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully and humbly submitted,

Elizabeth Stillgess