



September 16, 2020

## Interested Party Testimony for S.B. 358

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on S.B. 358. My name is Kevin Bacon, and I am the Executive Director and In-House Counsel for School Choice Ohio. School Choice Ohio is a nonprofit corporation that educates parents statewide on the availability of educational options in Ohio and advocates for quality educational opportunities for every child.

As schools continue to open for the new school year, it is clear that many of the changes we faced in the spring still exist. Our new normal is a challenging one and does require some revisions from business as usual. That said, it is crucial to deal with reality and work toward solutions that eliminate unfair sanctions while preserving transparency.

School Choice Ohio supports a number of the provisions in S.B. 358, including:

- Extending the exemption from retaining a student under the third-grade reading guarantee based solely on the student's academic performance in reading in the 2020-2021 school year; and
- Extending the prohibition against the use of specific components for community school sponsor ratings for the 2020-2021 school year; and
- Allowing schools and districts to elect to conduct evaluations of district employees for the 2020-2021 school year, if the local board determines that it would be impossible or impracticable to do so; and
- Permitting the Ohio Department of Education, on behalf of the State Board of Education, to issue one-year provisional licenses to educators that have met all other requirements for the requested license except for the requirement to pass a subject area exam for the 2020-2021 school year. Providing relief through provisions such as these can help schools focus on instruction and helping students; and
- Withholding overall report card ratings.

Removing these requirements would allow schools and districts to focus on addressing students' needs.

When it comes to testing, it may be that the solution lies between business as usual and eliminating testing for the 2020-21 school year. Ohio, like other states, must meet testing requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act. The results of federally required state assessments offer an essential objective appraisal of student progress and provide valuable information to parents and communities.

Finally, there are two provisions related to the EdChoice Scholarship Program that we do not support. We do not support extending the moratorium on awarding first time, performance-based Educational Choice (Ed Choice) scholarships for the 2021-2022 school year and again delaying the application period until April 1. School Choice Ohio also objects to the provision in S.B. 358 that delays when the Department must resume accepting, processing, and awarding performance-based Ed Choice scholarships from February 1, 2021, to February 1, 2022. These provisions unfairly penalize thousands of Ohio families and their children.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.