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State Representative

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee: Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 290, also known as The Backpack Bill.

Education is one of the most important parts of a child's life. Education can provide an opportunity for a child to succeed. But education is not a one size fits all concept. What works for one child, does not work for another. Over the past few years we have seen some alarming trends in our schools, such as a chronic absenteeism rate of over 50% in our state's more urban school districts (including 74.6% here in Columbus), falling test scores, and questionable curriculum choices. These examples demonstrate the need for a more robust and accountable education system in our state, and that is why Representative McClain and I introduced HB 290.

The Backpack Bill is not anti-public schools. Rather, it is a pro-child, pro-parent, pro-family bill which empowers parents and families to make a choice that is in the best interest of their child. We can share studies with the committee that show the positive impact school choice has on public education. Child outcomes are better and parent satisfaction, one of the best metrics of student success, is significantly higher. With robust school choice, free market concepts are applied to education, which has shown to drive improvement across the board. In addition, this bill does not change the allocation of local and federal tax dollars, which make up nearly 60% of the revenue school districts receive. This means the per-pupil funding is likely to be higher for students who remain in the public school system and do not use a Backpack Scholarship.

As I stated education is not a one size fits all and public education doesn't work for every student. A story was shared with me recently of a young boy enrolled in one of the highest-rated public school systems here in Central Ohio. At school this young man has been bullied and harassed mercilessly to the point where the parents want to transfer him to another school district. Unfortunately, their options are limited because they do not live in a school district that is eligible for EdChoice and open enrollment options are limited or non-existent. What are parents to do in these situations? I know a family where the grandparents are raising their grandson. There has been much confusion and contention in this child's life. As a result, he has behavioral issues where smaller class sizes benefit him. This is not the fault of the child or the public school, but choices are very limited for grandparents who are simply trying to give their

grandson the best chance of success. These stories go on and on and many will be shared with you throughout these hearings from parents and families who just want choice in one of the most important parts of their child's life.

To conclude, we need to shift the focus of education in Ohio back to the students. HB 290 does that. The Backpack Bill empowers students to receive the education that is best for them and suits their individual needs.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to testify today, and we are happy to answer any questions you may have.