



Villa Angela-St. Joseph
High School

HB 1 Interested Party Testimony
Lannie Davis-Frecker, President & CEO, Julie Billiard Schools
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Chair Tracy Richardson
March 1, 2021

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Troy and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for allowing me to testify today as an interested party on HB 1, sponsored by Representative Jamie Callender and Representative Bride Sweeney, to reform school funding in Ohio. I am the President and CEO of Julie Billiard Schools, a network of three schools in Lyndhurst, Akron and Westlake. I am here representing a coalition of catholic and private schools in Northeast Ohio that accept and educate students on the Autism and Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarships. Those schools are Benedictine High School in Cleveland, Cleveland Central Catholic High School, Villa Angela-Saint Joseph High School in Cleveland and the Rich Center for Autism at Youngstown State University. Each of our schools operates as a nonprofit, tuition-based private day school for students. We all have programs within or dedicated to children with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, and executive function issues and high-functioning autism.

I have had the great honor of serving as JB's President/CEO for five years but have been with Julie Billiard Schools for 12 years. I started as an intervention specialist in our 2nd grade classroom and then taught Kindergarten. As I earned a master's degree in education administration, I became our assistant principal and director of special education before becoming president and CEO. From the moment I worked with the children at JB, I knew I found my life's work. I fell in love with our mission- a mission that supports every decision coming back to what's best for our kids. A very real example of this mission coming to life is this past year- we have been in person all year long. We know the critical nature of in-person learning for our population and we have seen unprecedented growth and achievement from our students this year because of our decision and dedication to staying open during the pandemic.

Julie Billiard Schools is a network of private K-8 catholic schools in northeast Ohio serving students with special learning needs. Our flagship school in Lyndhurst has been dedicated to these students and mission for 66 years. For the past 10 years we have been adding seats and programs but still, the demand was great. It was only in the past five years that we embarked on a strategic growth plan to serve more students and families in need. We have expanded into Akron and Westlake with plans for a total of 6 Julie Billiard Schools to meet the demand. We plan to serve over 700 children with special needs in Northeast Ohio. Our students are bright, creative, and curious children coming from more than 40 school districts located throughout Northeast Ohio. Their JB education allows

them to grow, thrive and access the type of individualized curriculum and environment that leads to future success.

We know that what we do works. Over the past 11 years, 100% of our students have graduated from high school or an equivalent program or are on track to do so. Students in Ohio with an IEP have an average graduation rate of 67%. Success looks different for all of our children but their contribution is critical; our students become lawyers, electricians, chefs, assistants, greeters, baggers, managers, sales people, engineers, doctors, and so much more. Without access to this life changing education model, our students would not have the chance to beat the odds. These programs and scholarships are critical for their chance, their shot and their success.

The Autism and Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarships are critical to our success and the success of the schools I am here to represent. The programs empower parents who feel their public school isn't serving their child's needs with the ability to choose the best educational environment for their children. Quality education options are particularly important to parents of special needs children. Many schools cannot or do not provide the services needed for children with autism and special needs. For example, our students receive seven hours of direct intervention from certified intervention specialists with a maximum class size ratio of 1 to 8. Public schools do not offer this amount of intervention time, nor are they built to do that. This is why the autism and special needs scholarships exist. When a parent realizes their special needs child needs additional support, the scholarships offer them hope that their child will have a brighter future.

Unfortunately, unlike the other voucher programs in Ohio and public education in general, the special needs programs have been flat-funded since 2017 and have been capped at \$27,000 for some time. Neither HB 1, nor Governor DeWine's as introduced budget, increase the categories of the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship. Both proposals maintain the \$27,000 cap for children in greatest need, which is thousands less than public schools receive for the same children.

We encourage the legislature to increase funding for the special needs scholarships and remove the cap so that our schools can continue to serve the most special of our school-aged children. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.