

Testimony Regarding H.B. 110

Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding H.B.110.

I am Erin DuBois, an intervention specialist at Heritage Christian School in Canton, Ohio.

I'm testifying to express my support for increasing scholarship funding for EdChoice and Jon Peterson Scholarships.

I went back to school at the age of 48 to obtain my initial teaching licensure and master's degree in special education. I had spent 10 years working as an Orton-Gillingham instructor for dyslexic students at the Children's Dyslexia Center of Canton; in private instruction; and as a contracted paraprofessional for the Plain School District. I fully intended to work in public schools when receiving my licensure; however, when I was hired as a remedial reading tutor for Heritage Christian through our local district of Canton City, I learned the advantages of teaching at a private school, and accepted their offer two years later to replace their retiring IS.

I had been told often during graduate school that my experience with a coveted Tier 3 reading intervention like Orton-Gillingham would make me a "hot commodity" when I applied for jobs as an IS. So why would I accept a position that pays far, far less than public schools, that does not include a retirement plan, that offers a medical plan requiring the meeting of a high deductible that puts many health services common for a person of my age simply out of reach?

I stayed at Heritage because I fell in love with our diverse student body, our devoted and supportive administration, and our tireless faculty who advocate for the academic, emotional, and spiritual wholeness of our students. I stayed because I have agency at this school. My expertise is valued, and the administration acknowledges it by allowing me a greater voice in decisions that affect the well-being of my students. Furthermore, as a small community our size empowers us to gain a deeper understanding of each student to support their growth. You will never find a gen ed teacher at our school who doesn't know their student is on an IEP or 504. Our teachers are eager to refer to our in-house counseling agency because they recognize when the skill sets of another professional will help one of our kids. We bring a team approach to teaching that ensures all our students, particularly our most vulnerable, have a wide net of support beneath them at all times.

We currently service ten children with IEPs. My time in the classroom easily exceeds the recommended weekly duration for services and support, especially with students who receive the intensive support of Orton Gillingham reading instruction. We have students who receive speech therapy, occupational therapy, and work with a classroom aide. Those students run out of Jon Peterson funding long before the school year ends. What would happen if we

discontinued services at that point? 80% of our students qualify for reduced or free lunches. Do we ask the parents to pay for those services? That just isn't feasible for the vast majority of our families. Do we discontinue services? Of course not. The school, already hamstrung by the relatively low amount of funding available through EdChoice, quietly absorbs the cost and services continue uninterrupted. ,

It's no wonder, then, that yearly salary raises are so small. Service increases continue to accrue but scholarship funding amounts stay the same.

The families we work with have chosen Heritage Christian because they support our mission to educate the whole child. They appreciate the close attention their students receive in our small school and the family atmosphere we're able to maintain from year to year. I believe our families deserve teachers who are paid well for their hard work, who don't have to work two jobs to make ends meet, who don't have to bring the stresses of financial difficulties into the classroom with them.

I appreciate your past support of scholarship programs for private schools and ask you to consider expanding the EdChoice and Jon Peterson Scholarship programs so that no families are denied the opportunity to select the school in which they believe their children will thrive. I further ask that the value of the scholarships be increased, to support both the children who use them and the staff who work so hard to meet their needs. Finally, I ask that the application process be streamlined so that families who apply receive earlier notice of their acceptance. Currently there is a months-long lag-time which leaves families and students without the assurance of a place in the school of their choice.

I'm grateful to the members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee and to Chair Brenner and Ranking Member Fedor for hearing my concerns.

Sincerely,

Erin Finan-DuBois

Heritage Christian School Intervention Specialist