

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.

My name is Sharee Brandler, I am the Director of Business Operations at Bridgeway Academy.

I see the value of the Autism Scholarship everyday with the students and therapy clients that attend Bridgeway Academy. Never more so than when we reopened our doors in June of 2020 for our summer program. Throughout the 2020-21 academic year we have been able to provide 5 day in person learning for almost 200 students.

At Bridgeway Academy we often meet a family shortly after diagnosis of a young child. At 3 years old they become eligible for the Autism Scholarship, and we provide a full day program with highly trained staff who can individualize a learning plan while also giving the child the chance to learn with their peers.

Our goal for every student is that they are able to enroll in whatever school the parent had planned for them before the diagnosis. Often students are able to be in the less restrictive environment once enrolled at their home public school. We consider our program a partnership with the public school system to help each child meet or exceed expectations.

Families choose to stay at Bridgeway Academy because of our low teacher to student ratio ranging from 1:1 to 1:4. This allows us to continue to individualize programming for each student. In addition to the academics, Bridgeway also provides a place that students can have a social experience. When asked why he attends Bridgeway Academy a member of the class of 2021 talks about feeling unsafe in his previous school when labeled by his peers as "different".

Bridgeway Academy provides a highly trained staff of licensed teachers and Intervention Specialists, BCBAs, SLP, OT PT and Psychologists. The autism scholarship helps make this possible however, the full cost of tuition at Bridgeway Academy is not covered by the scholarship. Through the generosity of donors and staff we are able to provide some financial assistance however, each family still has an out of pocket expense. We are asking the Senate to approve an increase to the Autism Scholarship to help close this gap for families. Thank you.

I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.