



May 6, 2021

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 Amended Substitute H.B. 110.

My name is Eric Frank and I serve as Chairman and President of School Choice Ohio. School Choice Ohio focuses on advancing public policy that allows families to choose the best education for their children from a range of quality options.

While there is much to like about H.B. 110, my remarks today will focus primarily on several areas where changes would advance opportunities for Ohio students.

#### Quality Community School Support Fund

We strongly support the continuation of the Quality Community School Support Fund. This program, included in both the executive proposal and the House-passed version of H.B. 110, provides critical incentives to accelerate the sector's improvement further. We appreciate support for this fund by both the Governor and the House of Representatives, but respectfully request that the funding level be restored to \$54 million per year include in the As Introduced version of H.B.110. We would also urge the Senate to consider increasing the facilities funding for community schools to \$750 per pupil, in line with the recent report examining this issue.

#### Transportation

We support continued transportation for Ohio's community and chartered nonpublic school students as well as provisions designed to clarify expectations and deadlines. Limiting the use of public transit to students in grades 9-12, establishing a timeline for decisions related to payment in lieu, and requiring the Ohio Department of Education to monitor compliance with requirements are welcome changes. A provision added in the House that could lead to complex changes of bell schedules, should be removed by the Senate. Additionally, increasing the amounts of payment in lieu to a percentage of the calculated transportation cost would strengthen this important program for students. We recommend further analysis in this area.

#### Open Enrollment

HB 110 proposes to fund open enrolled students by only using the State Share Index of the resident district foundation amount. If this change is implemented, open enrollment could be underfunded creating a significant disincentive for districts to participate in open enrollment. Such a provision would jeopardize the education of over 80,000 students that currently use this public school choice option.

## Equitable Funding for Educational Choice Programs

The spirit of equity reflected in the school funding discussion must also include equitable funding levels for all school choice options.

We appreciate the work done by the Ohio House to improve funding levels to community schools, but there is still work to be done. Unlike districts, the base cost calculation for community schools fails to include minimum staffing requirements. As a result, the funding gap between community schools and districts continues to exist and even expands.

The House Passed version of H.B. 110 failed to address a needed increase in the value of scholarships. The current scholarship values for the EdChoice, Cleveland, Autism, and Jon Peterson scholarships have been locked in at the same levels since 2015. We recommend that these amounts be increased and indexed to future funding increases. We would support funding scholarships at the same level as the state formula amount calls for.

As Ohio recovers from the Covid-19 Pandemic, it is clear that Ohio families need more options and empowerment than ever before. We have heard from many families desperate for more choices. Ohio has long been a leader in empowering families, and SCO strongly supports all policies that advance this goal, agnostic to whether that means finding a home in a public, private, community school, or home environment. We should strongly consider following the lead of our neighbor to the west, by allowing more middle-class families to access this scholarship by raising the income limits to our EdChoice Income Based Scholarship, which is currently capped at 2.5 times the poverty level.

Although progress was made by the House in dealing with funding school choice programs directly, more work is needed. The language that would directly fund scholarships and community schools is not completely protected from a line-item veto. We believe several well-played revisions should be made if the Senate agrees that these programs should be funded directly. Additionally, should the Senate fund choice programs directly, the Income Based Scholarship program should be funded via the same line item as the other programs of choice. If the Income Based Program does remain with an independent line item, the line item should be funded at least at the amount appropriated for FY 21 in order to allow eligible families to participate. The line item in HB 110 as passed by the House is insufficient to support this program.

Our last concern related to funding choice programs is that the current version of H.B. 110 underestimates both community school enrollment and scholarship awards. The current version of the budget estimates that community school enrollment will be substantially less over the biennium and the increase in awarded scholarships will be a fraction of that seen in the last five years. These figures should be revised to reflect existing levels and expected increases.

School Choice Ohio and I welcome any questions.