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Sponsor Testimony – Senate Bill 368
Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Senator Sandra O'Brien
December 6, 2022

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to deliver sponsor testimony today on Senate Bill 368, the Parent Educational Freedom Act.

The Parent Educational Freedom Act is a bill that would expand the current EdChoice Scholarship to give universal eligibility to all students in the state of Ohio, and would expand the homeschool tax credit from \$250 to \$2,000. With the success of EdChoice, EdChoice Expansion, and the Cleveland Scholarship programs in recent years, there has been a rising desire for programs like these to be broader and accessible to a higher number of students and families. Parents know the needs of their children more than the state does, and the Parent Educational Freedom Act would capitalize on this rising desire to give parents the choice to send their children to schools they feel would be the best fit.

As written, this bill will provide \$5,500 for students in grades K-8, and \$7,500 for students in grades 9-12. The money may be used at any public, community, or chartered nonpublic school. This is exactly the same benefit that is currently available in the EdChoice and EdChoice Expanded Scholarship Program. The \$2,000 homeschool tax credit, similar to how it is currently written in the Revised Code, may be used for educational expenses such as books, supplies, software, subscriptions, and other materials that are used directly for home instruction. The Parent Educational Freedom Act would not be applicable for noncharter, nonpublic schools and would not replace the current Autism Scholarship or the Jon Peterson Special Needs programs.

Ohio should act now to put parents, not government, in control of their children's education. Throughout my personal life, I have held countless titles, but the most important title I hold is that of parent. Parents are the ultimate authority on all matters concerning their children, and they want options. If parents want their children educated in public schools, my bill protects their right to do so. We have some great public schools in Ohio. As a former public school teacher, I realize that public schools employ some of our best teachers and they can compete with any

institution. Ohio is fortunate to have many fine teachers and many public schools that work for students, but the one-size-fits-all approach to education simply does not work.

Every parent has the right to choose a school that best meets their student's needs. This is a right afforded to most affluent Ohioans currently, but property wealth and schooling should not be linked. High quality schools are often located in expensive neighborhoods. All families, regardless of income, should have the power to choose schools for their children that wealthy families have.

Contrary to claims that school choice results in less funding, Ohio data shows per-pupil funding actually increased between 2000 and 2019 in districts where charter and private schools were most prevalent. 25 different studies have shown competition leads to better outcomes for public schools. Competition makes everyone better. Now more than ever, parents are raising their voices for more options, more choices, and more freedom. Our goal is to have our students get an excellent education even if it means attending a different school. Let's put free markets to work to provide the best quality product and service in the most cost-effective way.

The school choice movement is gaining momentum, and learning options are gaining support. School choice was an important issue in the campaigns for public office over the past year. After playing a huge role in the 2021 Virginia governor's race, school choice has bipartisan support. Governors-elect Josh Shapiro in Pennsylvania, and JB Pritzker in Illinois, both Democrats, supported school choice. National polls in June showed voters everywhere supported school choice. Again, school choice has momentum and is bipartisan.

Ohio should act now and empower our families to make the best educational choices. We need to listen to our parents who want a voice in their children's education. We need to allow them to spend their hard-earned tax dollars on the school of their choice. My bill puts educational options within the reach of every parent in Ohio. It empowers our parents, is fairer to taxpaying parents, encourages healthy competition, and makes Ohio an even better state to raise a family. I urge support of this bill so every parent has the resources to make informed decisions about their child's educational future.

Thank you again, Chair Brenner, for allowing me to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 368, and I welcome any questions from the Committee.