



LUTHERAN EAST

Christ-Centered Education for Life

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Proponent Testimony on House Bill 200

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Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you for giving me a moment to speak today in support of HB 200. I have the joy of serving the students at Lutheran High School East in Cleveland Heights. We are a school of 275 students, about 250 of whom are on either the Cleveland Scholarship or the Ed Choice Scholarship.

Both the Cleveland Scholarship and the Ed Choice Scholarship are incredible blessings for parents and students. Parents want to put their children into schools which will allow them to flourish. But there is no "one size fits all" school. A school which is a great environment for some students may not fit others. That is the beauty of school choice. It empowers families to put their child in a culture and environment that is best for them. It isn't decided for them by the government but instead allows them the freedom to evaluate, compare, and then be excited to join a school community.

At Lutheran East, we have had incredible success with students who are on one of the State Scholarship programs. Over the past 5 years, we have graduated 90% of our 12th graders. 95% of our graduates have been accepted into colleges and universities. Those statistics would be very good, regardless of who our student population was. They are even more stark when you consider that the overwhelming majority of our students come from public school districts that are in ODE's list of poorest performing schools. School Choice has allowed students to change environments and grow in ways that they were not before coming to Lutheran East.

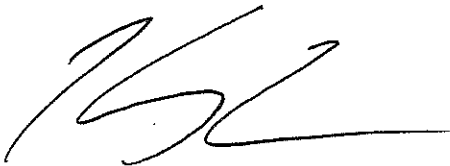
We do not have an Entrance Test - we make all admissions decisions based on student interviews. Our internal data illustrates that our average 9th grade student comes to us well below the 50th percentile nationally. One of the criticisms that is often levied against private or parochial schools is that we are able to do good work with students because we "skim off of the top" from public schools. That is emphatically not true for Lutheran East. We do not use standardized testing results for admissions. The reason we are able to realize good outcomes is because choice and culture matter. When parents choose a school based off of the culture it can provide for their students, the student will be more successful in the long run. That correct culture may be in a public school, it may be a charter school, or it may be a private school like Lutheran East. But the parents need to be empowered to make that choice and see their student benefit from it.

One of the biggest issues that exist with our current School Choice options, such as Ed Choice Scholarship and the Cleveland Scholarship, is that it hurts economic mobility. Parents will receive the scholarship because they live in Cleveland, Euclid, or Warrensville Heights. If they move, they are at risk for losing their scholarship. I have seen families move less than ¼ of a

mile from East Cleveland to Cleveland Heights and lose their Ed Choice scholarship. This is painful to students and parents who have come to value the school and the environment it provides. We should value and encourage economic mobility - instead our current system stifles it.

HB 200 is an incredible opportunity for our state. It would fix the current Economic Immobility byproduct of our current school choice laws while simultaneously empowering more families to choose the best situation for their student. Education is one of the most important factors in a student's life. Giving families the power to choose that education will best serve students and, ultimately, the entire State of Ohio. This should not be a debate about schools, it should be about how do we best serve and empower families.

We graduated 44 Seniors last Friday evening. It was a great celebration, as all of them are accepted into colleges and planning on enrolling for the fall. Of those 44, 35 are first-generation college students. The education they have received at Lutheran East literally has changed their prospects in life. After the ceremony, I spent some time talking with the mother of one of our students. He was a 4 year student who came to Lutheran East on the Ed Choice Scholarship. She told me that she came to our school with her son because she wanted a different atmosphere than she was receiving in her local public school. It was about safety for her - not academics. As she hugged me and wiped away tears, she told me that she never would have imagined that he would graduate and be headed to Ohio State on an academic scholarship. That is the power of School Choice - bringing hope to families so that their students can flourish. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you or your committee may have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'PSL' followed by a long horizontal stroke.