

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, I would like to take a moment and thank you for allowing me to be here today.

My name is Walter Blanks, and I am currently a senior at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. I am majoring in Journalism and Media Production.

Growing up, school was always hard for me. My family had a very low income, and I was constantly moving from school to school. At a young age I was diagnosed with ADHD and always seen as a problem in the classroom. I would remember coming home with ripped up clothing and bruises all over my body from excessive bullying. My family and I light heartedly joke and say that it seemed that my parents were at the school more than I was. I was constantly in the principal's office or sitting off in a corner by myself.

After years of searching for a better way of life, my parents found out about the EdChoice Scholarship. I was able to utilize this scholarship from 6th to 12th grade.

As I mentioned previously, I am now a senior at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. When I am not at school, I am currently working at a high end clothing store here in Columbus. Because of my education and the confidence it has given me, I have been able to rub shoulders with some very successful people who are willing to help me be successful in life as well.

I plan to go on and receive my bachelor's in journalism and continue to be a positive influence and help people get the kind of education I was fortunate enough to receive. I would like to become a public speaker and travel and continue to inspire everyone I come across, not just on the educational side but just life in general.

This scholarship is extremely important for students because they need to be taught properly. Every child has the right to receive an education that will allow them to chase their dreams and become whatever they choose to be. No one should be limited by their zip code or their income. Children with a proper education have the opportunity to break the cycle of low income within their family and actually make something of themselves.

I thank you because all of you were fighting for me before you even knew me or my story. All I ask is that we continue to help and inspire and impact the lives of students who need a good education. That's why I'm fighting so hard and supporting this because I have seen firsthand what it can do. Without this scholarship, I would either be incarcerated or in the ground.

Everything you see before you today is a product of that scholarship. It is absolutely imperative that all of us continue to fight and help kids receive a better education. This means everything to me and it has made all the difference in my life!