



Testimony to the Ohio House Education & Career Readiness Committee
On House Bill 200
June 6, 2017

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Education & Career Readiness Committee, thank you for conducting this hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Ezra Escudero and I am the Ohio Coalitions Director for The LIBRE Initiative, which is a part of Americans for Prosperity. The LIBRE Initiative, together with Americans for Prosperity, forms the nation's largest free market advocacy network. On behalf of tens of thousands of activists in Ohio, I urge you to support House Bill 200, which strengthens Ohio's school choice program.

Under this legislation, children will be able to receive need-based scholarships, as determined by family income. Parents make school choices based upon academic performance, athletics, culture, faith, location, safety, and best-fit among other criteria. Since the state taxes residents to pay for schools, this means that only those who can afford to pay twice – the wealthy – get to exercise their right to school choice. The point is that so many lower-income families don't get to make this choice – HB200 makes this choice possible for more Ohioans, especially those who cannot afford to pay twice for education.

Hispanic Americans overwhelmingly support expanding educational choice. In a recent national survey by EdChoice, seven in ten Latinos support of school choice programs, including education savings accounts. Further, if given a choice, nearly 50% of Hispanic Americans would choose to send their children to a private school, about one-third to public school, and the balance split between charter and home school options.¹

A recent study by the Pew Research Center measured the top priorities of Hispanic Americans. Improving the educational system ranked as the top issue – higher than strengthening the economy, reducing healthcare costs, and even dealing with the issue of immigration! At first, it may sound surprising, but when one stops to think about how education is a key determinant of long-term success, and how many Latino families support school choice programs, this result turns out not to be that shocking after all.²

In Ohio, Hispanics make up 5.2 percent of all students in our schools, but recent demographic trends are quickly reshaping the make-up of our K-12 system. In fact, while enrollment for White and African American students has been declining from 2011 and 2015, the Hispanic enrollment in our K-12 system has grown by nearly thirty-seven percent during the same period and it is expected to continue growing.³

These numbers make it clear that increasing access to a high-quality education for Latino students would go a long way toward securing the long-term economic prosperity of our state. In the end, what is good for Hispanic Ohioans is good for all Ohioans.

Ohio has been one of the early leaders on school choice.⁴ And while other states have been expanding educational choice by enacting new forms of school choice, our state has been falling behind. Based upon Ohio's established track record with school choice, we are confident that the cost of HB200 will be approximately \$20 million annually. Besides being \$1 billion dollars less than some extreme estimates, HB200 is funded in a much more transparent manner than the current model, it simplifies accounting for local public schools, and it helps to keep more local dollars in place locally. These are tremendous improvements which demand your attention and support.

HB200 represents an opportunity for you to renew your commitment to putting the best high quality education within reach of those children who may otherwise find themselves trapped in schools that cannot serve their needs or do not reflect their family's values and priorities. What is best and high quality? That is for parents to decide. The LIBRE Initiative and Americans for Prosperity strongly support the passage of HB200, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

Ezra Escudero
Coalitions Director for The LIBRE Initiative
Americans for Prosperity – Ohio

Sources

1. <https://www.edchoice.org/research/latino-perspectives-on-k-12-education-school-choice/>
2. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/02/23/latinos-and-the-new-trump-administration/>
3. <http://ochla.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Education/Latino-Hispanic%20Education%20Data%20for%20Ohio.pdf>
4. <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/school-choice-in-america/>

Americans for Prosperity (AFP) exists to recruit, educate, and mobilize citizens in support of the policies and goals of a free society at the local, state, and federal level, helping every American live their dream – especially the least fortunate. AFP has more than 3.2 million activists across the nation, a local infrastructure that includes 36 state chapters, and has received financial support from more than 100,000 Americans in all 50 states. For more information, visit www.AmericansForProsperity.org.