



AMERICAN FEDERATION  
*for Children*

House Bill 200 Testimony  
House Education and Career Readiness Committee  
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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the committee. My name is Alyson Miles, and I'm the Director of Government Affairs for the American Federation for Children. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 200, a bill to create the Ohio Opportunity Scholarship.

This testimony is follow-up to the testimony I provided last June.

House Bill 200 combines Ohio's three non-special needs scholarship programs into one income-based program called the Ohio Opportunity Scholarship. This program funds a child's K-12 education somewhere other than where they are assigned. Students in families that meet the income requirements may choose to apply for a scholarship and use it towards tuition at a private school. There is no requirement in the bill for any students to leave their assigned school; they only leave if they make this choice. Also, the program is capped at 60,000 scholarships per year.

The move to an income-based program is the step in the right direction for Ohio. Our current programs, while great stepping stones for school choice in this state, leave many students in low- and middle-income families behind.

Under this bill, no longer will students from our low- and middle-income families be prohibited from choosing a school that best fits their needs because they don't live in Cleveland or their school is doing just well enough to stay off the EdChoice list or they are not yet served by the Income-based Program. All Ohio students are required to attend school, but we shouldn't simply want them to attend, they also need to learn. If a student is in a school where they are not learning, they should have a choice to go somewhere else, regardless of how well their assigned school is doing. If you grew up in a low-income family like I did, you regularly heard "that costs too much" or "we can't afford that" or "maybe next year." But these statements should never be made when we're discussing a necessity like education.

HB 200 proposes changing the funding for scholarships from the deduct and transfer model and line-item funding to a direct funding model. This means that a district would have a reduction in funding only if a student chooses to leave the district, which is the same as if a child moved out

of the district or graduated. Plus, the only state dollars the district would no longer receive are those state dollars that had been allocated for the scholarship student. No local dollars are moved; the district would still receive any locally raised funds for that student.

Also, as a reminder, the bill has several statutory accountability components:

- Scholarship recipients are required to take state assessments
- ODE must compile and disaggregate student performance data and post online
- Value-Added scores for scholarship students will be calculated

Additionally, parents are the most important accountability factor. If parents are unhappy with the education their children are receiving at a private school, they'll send them somewhere else. No one is forcing parents to use a scholarship or send their children to a private school, and with more options available, parents will be the driving force in how students are educated, leading to innovation and improvements for all schools.

### Conclusion

Leaving a public school is not for everyone, but the choice to leave should be available to all. Educational choice is about having options for a student's education and ensuring that those options are funded. We should stop trying to force students into a one-size-fits-all system. Access to a quality K-12 education should be for everyone, not just those who can afford it. It is important to empower parents with the opportunities to choose the best type of program for their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 200 and for your hard work for Ohio's students. AFC and I look forward to working with you on the bill and to strengthen Ohio's school choice programs. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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