Bill Cervenik

President/Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School

Opponent/SB 241

May 23, 2018

Good morning. Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, ranking member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am here today to express my opposition to SB 241, and how it can negatively affect the students of our school.

My name is Bill Cervenik. I am the President of Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School, located on the eastern border of Cleveland and Euclid, Ohio. I have served in this position for two years. Prior to this, I served as the Mayor of Euclid for twelve years and was a member of its city council for an additional twelve years, the last five as Council President.

It is important that you understand

Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School is a Catholic, comprehensive college-preparatory school rooted in the Ursuline and Marianist traditions and committed to the spiritual, academic, and personal growth of each student.

The majority of our students are not Catholic. Fifty-one percent of our families live at or below the poverty level. Sixty-five percent of the families cannot afford to pay one half of our $9,300 annual tuition. Over sixty percent of our students are African American. 310 of 446 students receive the Cleveland or Ed-Choice scholarships. Simply stated, Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School looks very much like the neighborhoods we serve, specifically the Collinwood area of Cleveland and the City of Euclid, where eight out of ten of our students reside.

Our student enrollment has increased from 290 to 446 from the 2012/13 school year to the present. In the past five years, over 97% of our students went on to some form of higher educational.

The success of our students indicates that regardless of their families affluence or their own academic preparation, students learn best — and are best prepared for success in college and life — when they learn with students whose gifts and talents are different; whose backgrounds are different; whose views of the world have been shaped by different experiences.

We are concerned that SB 241 not only creates a perception that certain schools, those accredited by the Independent Schools Association of Central States, are of higher quality than schools accredited by some other ODE approved accrediting association, but would in effect determine winners and losers.

“Winners” would be selected because they are accredited by ISACS. Any nonpublic school, regardless of its quality and reputation in the community, would be disenfranchised from privileged status into a newfound Division of Accreditation Schools because the school is accredited by a sectarian accrediting association.

This, on its face, seems discriminatory against religious schools.

Moreover, if this bill becomes law, the General Assembly would be placing itself in an omniscient position to determine which schools are in and which schools are extricated from the new Division.

This would be an injustice for most of the nonpublic schools in Ohio.

In the nonpublic school community, the best school for one family may not necessarily be the best school for another family. There are different schools for different students in which parents select schools that are best suited for their children.

Is an independent school comprised of students from wealthy families superior to a faith based school in which at-risk students are educated achieve academically at grade level and beyond? I would tell you certainly not.

For the record, I am in agreement with the concerns raised by Mr. Larry Keough of the Catholic Conference.

I respectfully request that this bill, in its current form, no longer be considered and that a number of interested party meetings be scheduled to discuss fully the concerns of all parties affected by this legislation. Such discussions would lay the ground work for decisions to be rendered that are fair and equitable for all.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Cervenik, President

Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School