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Senator John Eklund – Sponsor Testimony  
Senate Bill 294  
Senate Education Committee  
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Good Afternoon Chairwoman Lehner, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 294 which, if enacted, would increase the maximum amount that may be awarded to students under the Pilot Project Scholarship Program.

Study after study indicates the critical importance of pre-school, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten through eighth grade. The third grade reading guarantee demonstrates that the early years of one's life are the strongest predictors of social and economic stability in adulthood.

As a society we must resource the early years equally for all students; especially at-risk youth in distressed areas of our State. The Cleveland Scholarship Program "CSP" has served as an excellent model for meeting this need. As we all know, the early years of a child's education require low staff to student ratios to ensure that in-depth attention is provided to teach children how to read and understand basic concepts that serve as the backbone for learning.

The current maximum CSP scholarship of \$4,650 for grades K-8 and \$6,000 for grades 9-12 does not cover nearly the actual cost to educate the youngest and most vulnerable children the program attempts to serve.

Additionally this level of funding is insufficient to hire enough qualified staff and to purchase materials needed to teach children in the younger years. And like other schools, this funding shortage exacerbates budget gaps to cover basic healthcare costs and routine facility maintenance expenses.

Which is why, SB 294 will increase the maximum Cleveland Scholarship to \$7,000 for grades K-12 and will dramatically boost the indicators of success for young children while still representing only a fraction of the cost compared to other school funding choices in the State of Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 294, and I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.