



9/1/2020

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today as a proponent of Senate Bill 358. My name is Elizabeth Kirby and I am the Superintendent of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

You might recall that back in February, I came to the Statehouse along with other leaders, supporters and students from my district to testify on House Bill 9. Although we were one of hundreds of districts and schools who descended on Columbus to give testimony regarding EdChoice, the reason I expect that CH-UH sticks out in your mind is because in the state of Ohio, the children of my district are giving up the highest percentage of their state funding to pay for other children's private tuition via EdChoice. This year alone, more than \$7 million (a third of our state funding) has been deducted from our budget to pay for private school tuition. Next year, we expect that figure to be more than \$9 million.

Of course, about a month after our trip to Columbus, the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools across the state and the nation to close their doors and move to a virtual education platform. Now our state funding is cut an additional \$1.4 million annually with federal dollars covering only a fraction of that loss. Add to this our levy failure this spring, and we are facing a deficit to the tune of \$9 million by 2022. We need relief, and we need it immediately.

I greatly appreciate the EdChoice scholarship-related components that you've included in SB 358. It shows that you are listening to those of us who have been asking for help the last couple of years. But I must ask that if you elect to freeze report card grades and existing sanctions and penalties for two years, **please also freeze new EdChoice applications - including siblings of scholarship recipients - during those two years as well**. If buildings are not given the opportunity to be removed from the EdChoice designation list, additional students should not have the opportunity to receive new scholarships.

While the idea of freezing state report card scores for two years is good on the surface, I fear we'll still be using 2013-2014 data into 2022-2023 because we'll be adding two more

Safe Harbor years. We'll have high school juniors touring their future colleges and we'll still be using their Third Grade Reading Guarantee data to award new scholarships to students from their elementary schools. If we do not allow ANY new scholarship applications for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, it will keep the applications more fairly aligned to the performance data.

HB 197 froze the EdChoice designation list to those who were eligible as of 2018-2019. While this benefited all of the new buildings that would have become eligible in 2019-2020, districts with existing EdChoice eligible buildings will see an additional decrease in our state funding to fund these new applications. We've had 554 new applications for the 2020-2021 school year. Allowing new applications for the next two years will only increase the scholarship deduction for us. If you choose to continue accepting new applications, then we ask for you to consider changing the funding source for EdChoice scholarships. Our district would respectfully recommend that rather than expanding the deduction from existing EdChoice-affected school districts, the legislature should fund a separate line item for *new* scholarships. Scholarship money should be removed from all district funding just like the EdChoice Expansion program is, or consider only deducting scholarship dollars from our district for students who leave our district to accept a scholarship.

Again, thank you for the thought you have put into this bill thus far, and I appreciate the opportunity to share our concerns from our perspective. I hope that we can collaborate on a wholly fair approach to this issue.

With gratitude,

Elizabeth A. Kirby

Superintendent

Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District

