

Sept. 16, 2020
Senate Education Committee
Interested Party/SB350
Joann Anderson

I am the parent of an elementary school student who relies on our public school district to provide transportation to my son's out-of-district Catholic school, Incarnate Word Academy. This valuable service was recently cancelled by a Resolution passed by the school district. We are homeowners and taxpayers in the district who do not use the public schools, but believe we should receive transportation services to our out-of-district school.

We rely on the transportation provided by the district to get our younger son to and from his out-of-district elementary school safely. Our older son used the out-of-district service nearly every day from first to eighth grade. Now that he is in high school at St. Ignatius Catholic High School more than thirty minutes outside the district, he is not eligible for transportation.

The transportation service provided by the district is costly; however, it pales in comparison to the cost of educating my child. According to its website, our district spends \$8,872 to educate every student in the district. The district does not spend that to educate my child! The expenditure for busing my child does not come near to that figure. I believe the district saves substantially by not bearing the burden of educating my child. At a minimum, the district should be required to provide transportation for my son. In 2019, our district passed a Resolution to cancel our out-of-district transportation. The district declared transportation impractical under ORC 3327.02, yet it did not specify which of the six elements under the law made the service to our school impractical. The district generalized and announced that it had considered each of the factors. I believe their decision was arbitrary.

The district cancelled my son's service, yet it continues to provide service on two out-of-district routes that cost more per pupil and transport fewer students respectively. The district applied "impracticality" in an ambiguous manner because there is no quantitative measure in the impracticality standard.

When our district passed the Resolution of impracticality, our local mayor heard of our plight and invited the parents to City Hall to discuss the situation. Although the mayor made clear that he did not have influence over the school board, he helped us to gather as a group and make a plan to challenge the school board's Resolution. Brunswick Mayor Ron Falconi opened our first meeting at City Hall by saying, "They collect your taxes and you get nothing. It's a perfect situation for them."

Mayor Falconi's words helped to catalyze our group to turn down the Payment in Lieu offer from the district and to go to mediation. In mediation, the district was clear that it would not provide service to our out-of-district school. The parents, in turn, asked for a Section 119 Hearing. In addition, the parents hired an attorney to represent their interests at the Section 119 Hearing. We are currently awaiting the decision of the Hearing Officer.

As we wait to learn whether or not we will get our bus back, there are approximately 40 students who were eligible to ride the bus. If Brunswick spends \$8,872 to educate each student, the district is saving the cost to educate each of the 40 students who ride with my

son. That is a savings of \$354,880 to the district. Our bus route cost the district about \$50K each year.

The process of gathering parents and declining the Payment in Lieu offer has been complicated and exhausting. Thus far, I have met with parents multiple times and shared countless emails and texts. I have attended several school board meetings, requested a mediation, rode along on a time-study of the bus route, attended a mediation, hired an attorney, and testified at a hearing. The process, which has taken 18 months since the Resolution, still has many steps after the Hearing Officer's decision.

As a practical matter, we decided to move our son from the school where the bus service was eliminated. We are still out-of-district; however, we are closer to home should the district decide to eliminate that route in the coming years. We hated to move our son at the start of this school year. He is a child we adopted from foster care. He has already lost everything! He lost his friends and classmates and school this year because we have no transportation alternatives. Further, we will not enroll him in the local school because his biological family members attend the district schools.

It is not feasible for working families to have to fight this hard to get their child to a school eight miles from home with no certainty that the bus will continue. In fact, the Brunswick district "cancelled" service in 2014 and 2018, but reinstated it after parents complained. It was 2019 when the district decided to cancel and we turned down their Payment in Lieu offer. Since 2014, there were three "cancellations" of bus service to our out-of-district school. That has been very stressful.

I implore the Committee to look at out-of-district transportation as a necessity for families. Please look at the cost to educate students versus the cost to transport students outside the district. It is inequitable to ask taxpayers to pay into a system and receive nothing in return. Parents of private school students are asking their districts for a minimal benefit. I hope that you will correct the inequity to the families who pay taxes into a school sys