December 8, 2020

Senate Education Committee
HB 111 – Opponent Testimony
Ohio Association of Independent Schools
Dan Dodd – Executive Director

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 111. My name is Dan Dodd and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Independent Schools, an association of independent private schools throughout the state of Ohio, 38 of which are accredited by the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS).

The practice of withholding student records or transcripts until there is an agreement reached on the payment of past due tuition is a common practice in private schools. There are several reasons why this is the case. First, it is a cost-effective way for both schools and parents to complete the terms of the enrollment contract that all parties agreed to prior to a student's enrollment. Second, it is the option that will do no permanent damage to a family's credit situation. Third, other options will drive up costs for those families remaining at the school who keep their commitment and pay according to what was agreed to in the enrollment contract.

As an association, our heads of school are not unsympathetic to the concerns raised about access to records. If this was a bill to require just the records pertaining to an IEP be sent along to a student's new school, I might not be here to testify against the bill. The same could be said if this bill's requirement only applied to public schools, since it is troubling that a student's constitutional right to a public education is being infringed upon by a district funded with tax dollars. Finally, if a student had the vast majority of his or her tuition paid for by the State of Ohio through the EdChoice Scholarship and the records were withheld for an unpaid portion of the school's tuition, it would probably be a different conversation. However, none of these hypotheticals are the case. It treats every situation the same, whether it's an $85 book fee or tens of thousands of dollars of unpaid tuition, and paints everyone with same brush, meaning that parents in a disagreement with the school over something unrelated to tuition get the same relief as those who may be struggling to make ends meet due to a change in circumstances.

Our organization strongly recommends that the committee take a more targeted approach to this issue and limit the circumstances in which records from a school have to be sent to a different school. Book fees and other fees generated by public school districts should not be treated the same as a contract agreed upon by two willing parties. Changes and limits like those mentioned above will provide relief to those who need it and continue to hold those who can and should pay accountable.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.