

Written Testimony-HB11  
March 14, 2023

Representative Marilyn John and Representative Riordan McClain, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 11, the Backpack Bill.

The Backpack Bill is extremely important to our family as it would help to expand our options of which school our daughter attends and the type of education she receives. I am a parent located in Lewis Center, Ohio, who is extremely concerned about the future success of my child and her education. This bill is key to ensuring a successful future for all children. Parents know the needs of their children better than anyone else, it would allow parents the choice to send their children to schools that best align with their family needs.

It is imperative that the state of Ohio allow parents the ability to control the outcome of their children's education. In my own family's personal experience, the school district my child attends may appear to be doing well, but parents and community members have uncovered some truly concerning issues. We currently live in the Olentangy school district, which is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest school district within Ohio. The issues we have experienced extend from lack of transparency and communication with the parents/community, to the discrimination of certain groups of students that attend this school district. When making decisions that impact our children, this school district has proven time and time again that they do not have the best interest of all our children. These are just a small portion of the many issues within the district that have been exposed over the last couple of years.

As a family, we have experienced these issues firsthand in Olentangy city schools. This school year, my child walked into one of her classrooms, where walls were filled with nothing but political and activists' symbols. Let me preface this with the fact that this was not a political activist class she was supposed to be attending. Immediately, she felt uncomfortable as this completely went against our family beliefs and values. Multiple communications were shared between the school board members, superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, and me. Some of which were never even responded to. Multiple parents communicated their dismay regarding the unhealthy learning environment this teacher provided, still nothing was done. We ended up dropping the class because administration would not address this teacher and his behavior. In the end, my child was forced to sacrifice her education because a teacher felt the need to push his political agenda in his classroom setting. This is unacceptable, as no child should ever have to be placed in a situation where they must choose between being educated or leaving an environment that is not inclusive to all students.

The academics of our children have suffered as they struggle to find teachers who want to truly focus on teaching academics, rather than incorporating Critical Race Theory (CRT) or Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into their lessons. This is extremely telling as to what this school district focuses on regarding our children and the education they are providing. I've heard many complaints from parents within this district that it appears the kids are running the classrooms and schools. Many teachers along with principals are not properly disciplining children when they violate the student handbook rules. Bullying has continued to get worse because the children know there are no ramifications for their actions.

As a parent who is experiencing issues with their local school district, I would love the opportunity to send my child to a school that follows through with holding our children, teachers, and administration accountable for their actions, as well as one that cares about providing a safe learning environment for all students. Parents have sent multiple communications regarding the many issues identified throughout our schools to the school board and superintendent; nothing is ever done to correct these issues/concerns. Half of the time, parents do not even receive a response back regarding their concerns. As parents, we only want to see our children excel and be provided a learning environment that is conducive for success.

Every parent should have the opportunity to choose a school that is best suited for their child. A family's income should not determine if your child receives the benefits of a good education by attending a school of their choice. Personally, I think the Olentangy school district, along with other public-school districts, could use a little healthy competition. This would hold the school districts accountable for the decisions they make regarding our children and the standards of education they provide. Please consider supporting this bill as this would allow more parents, like me, the opportunity to make decisions that are best for our families.

Thank you again, for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB11, I am happy to respond to any questions committee members may have at this time.

Sincerely,

Melissa Williams