

Good afternoon,

Thank you to Chair, Rep. Bird, Vice Chair Rep. Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Rep. Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee for allowing me to speak today. Thank you, Representative McClain and Representative John along with all the other Cosponsors for introducing the Establish the Backpack Scholarship Program bill and for recognizing that all parents deserve a choice as to where and in what manner their children should be educated.

My name is Robyn Houze. My husband Jason and I have two sons attending the Olentangy Local School District. We are one of the “gap” families, we earn above the threshold to be considered in need of scholarships or aid, however, sending our kids to private school will cause significant financial burden to our family budget.

Olentangy is considered by many to be an excellent school and it sure looks good on paper. Not to mention the fact the local property taxes are higher than many other districts. However, I am standing here today because our experience has not been excellent. My two sons are not being challenged to excel in their studies. When they meet the minimum standards of an assignment, they are praised for success instead of inspired to work to their full potential. Accolades are often over inflated causing students to believe they are excelling when they are just doing average work. One example I have witnessed of this is with teachers not correcting spelling and grammatical errors with the rationale that they worry that they may harm the child’s self-esteem. Too much of my sons’ school day is being filled with social emotional learning instead of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Parents have requested that schools stay in their lane and focus on academics yet too many teachers continue to push an ideological agenda and defend their actions simply by stating they are DEI or SEL efforts. Parents should not have to worry that when they put their young children on the bus for school that they may return home morally injured or prematurely introduced to mature sexual content.

We would have liked to have had the opportunity to send our sons to another school for kindergarten to have avoided Olentangy’s part-time funky kindergarten schedule. The 2 day some weeks and 3-day other weeks provides many logistical hardships for parents and is confusing to kids. The offering of enrichment programs by preschools or daycares in the area for the off days is limited further challenging the situation for working parents.

Sadly, we have seen no plan from Olentangy to recover from the Covid related loss of learning. My husband and I are currently paying for outside tutoring for both English language arts and math for our older son. We have asked the school for assistance but are told he is doing just fine. Staff expectations have been lowered and each year our son has been passed on to the next teacher for them to deal with the decrease in academic performance.

We were excited to hear about HB11 being introduced and the options it could provide for our sons. I applaud the fact that the proposed bill states that the schools that elect to participate be given maximum freedom to provide for the educational needs of their students. If one takes the time to pull back the layers to the Olentangy five-star rating for the state testing results one

will see that not all the bars flow in a positive direction. For the Olentangy District, state testing does not paint a true picture of the academic performance of the whole student body. I urge you to not have a mandatory testing component of this bill. But to allow the schools and the parents to decide how best to measure a student's academic progress.

What is desperately needed by parents is a state program that allows resources to follow the student in the form of a parent controlled educational savings account no matter what public, community, or chartered nonpublic school option they choose for their children to attend.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 11. I'm happy to answer any questions.