

Opposition Testimony on HB 11
Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Chair: Adam C. Bird
Vice Chair: Sarah Fowler Arthur
Ranking Member: Phillip M. Robinson, Jr.

Submitted by: Dr. William Benninger and Patty Benninger

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, thank you for the opportunity to submit oppositional testimony opposing HB 11. My name is Patty Benninger. I am a retired teacher with over 40 years of experience. My husband is a psychologist who has worked with children concerning ADHD. We have two adult daughters who went through 12 years of primary and education in public schools and both were very prepared for college coursework.

In considering an expansion of any voucher program, like the Backpack bill, we need to consider the cost to Ohio citizens. The nonpartisan Legislative Services Commission has stated in their fiscal analysis that the Backpack Scholarship Program would cost about \$1.13 billion in FY2025. Since 90% of Ohio students attend public schools, it is frustrating to see that this proposal would allocate money given to private/charter schools. Public schools could benefit from this \$1.13 billion, just to maintain their buildings. Transportation costs for school districts would increase, as many of the public school districts presently bus children to private schools.

Another issue to consider is how the private/charter schools will be held accountable. These schools are often not subject to public fiscal accountability such as an audit, unlike public schools. Unlike public school districts, which are subject to R.C. Sec.149.43, private schools are not required to respond to public record requests by providing records that document their policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities (Franklin County, Ohio Court of Common Pleas, Case No. 22CV000067, pg.26).

There have also been reports on the misuse of the voucher money, e.g., nepotistic hiring, charter school board members overpaying themselves, and undocumented purchasing. (<https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/02/02/ohio-cheats-public-schools-and-taxpayers-by-funneling-to-private-schools-without-accountability/>)

There is evidence that public schools out-perform private schools. A Cincinnati Enquirer analysis found that in 88% of the Ohio cities in their review, public schools achieved better standardized test results than private schools with an address in the same city. (<https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2020/08/19/private-school-ohio-vouchers/5399188002/>)

The First Amendment of our Bill of Rights mandates that no law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion. Reporting in the Ohio Capital Journal (<https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2022/08/24/the-hidden-role-of-a-religious-special-interest-group-in-ohios-education-backpack-bill/>) indicates that the “Backpack Bill” was written with help from the religious lobbying group, “The Center for Christian Virtue”.

Many of the schools accepting vouchers are permitted to refuse admission to a student who has disabilities, disciplinary records, or poor academic records. Public schools are the “Statue of Liberty of education.” (<https://bgindependentmedia.org/vouchers-siphon-taxpayer-dollars-from-public-education-to-private-schools/>)

The expansion of the private/charter school program would include building more private schools, as the “Christian schools are nearly full,” according to Ben Douglas, founder of the Westside Christian Academy. He networks with many Christian schools and stated that they are “unprepared for an influx” of students.

It would be helpful for legislators to get feedback from public school superintendents, teachers, and teacher organizations to determine how this bill negatively affects their funding. Since a large consortium of school districts felt the need to file a lawsuit claiming that voucher programs are unconstitutional, it is revealing that those closest to public education in Ohio are frustrated with Ohio’s frequent increases in costs for vouchers.

Please help support the Ohio public school system and oppose HB 11.

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