

Opponent Testimony for HB11
House Committee on Primary and Secondary Education
4/25/2023

Joseph Bjorkman
Citizen of Ohio

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Artuher Fowler, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Committee on Primary and Secondary Education,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Joe Bjorkman and I am a proud Ohio public schools graduate. I would like to preface my testimony with this: I am not opposed to non-public schools. I believe if a student or their family decides that attending a non-public school is the best thing for them, they should be able to make that choice.

But I also believe in the Ohio Constitution. I believe that we as citizens of the state, and you as elected officials who have sworn to defend it, should uphold our sacred constitution.

Article VI, section 2 of that very document states: "The General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state; but no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state."

Our constitution and the people demand a thorough and efficient system of schools that protect the common good. Public schools that are funded through our general assembly's tax system that assist Ohio's common good.

In 1997 our school funding system was deemed unconstitutional, relying too heavily on property taxes. Now our general assembly is attempting to create a near infinite pool of money to fund non-public schools.

Before our state uses tax dollars to fund non-public schools, I believe that we should uphold our constitution and fully fund our public schools so that where you live does not determine your quality of education.

Non-public schools, strangely, are not a public good and should not replace public schools. Since acceptance to non-public institutions is up to those institutions, it cannot be defined as a public good. The bottom line of education should be to educate and prepare our

students for the world after graduation. This is the role of public schools, their only bottom line, and it should be what we focus on.

By providing scholarships for any students who attend a non-public school and allowing that scholarship money to be used to enhance their educational experience, the state is incentivizing a public school drainage which will only result in further funding decreases.

Non-public schools couldn't possibly be prepared for an influx in students since 771 of the 1,370 non-public schools in Ohio are only pre-K and Kindergarten schools. I'm glad our state is making an investment in childcare, however misguided that investment may be.

There are 16 counties in Ohio that only have one non-public school and half of them do not provide for a student's entire K12 education. Non-public institutions are not designed to withhold the entirety of our state's students, yet we are now pushing more funding towards them and draining funding from our public schools. The result will be even weaker public schools.

This will affect rural Ohioans that don't have access to non-public schools, urban Ohioans who can't all possibly fit into non-public schools, and every Ohioans who will feel the economic effects of young people leaving and families not wanting to move here.

If we want Ohio to continue to be a place where young families are raised, you need to invest in us. That begins with our education and continues as we transition to the workforce.

I ask you to vote no on this bill and to fully fund the fair school funding plan and invest in our public school systems.

Thank you.