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House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
HB 11 - Opponent Testimony

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Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today in opposition to House Bill 11.

My name is Alison Paxson, and I am a Senior Policy Associate for the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. With more than four decades of advocacy on behalf of Ohio's children, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness. I am here today to urge this committee to not move forward with House Bill 11, Ohio's "Backpack Bill".

House Bill 11 would carve out a massive amount of taxpayer dollars from our state budget - [up to \\$1.2 billion a year](#) according to an analysis from the Ohio Legislative Service Commission (LSC) - and divert these essential resources away from the public schools that nine in ten of Ohio children attend, ultimately defunding them and weakening their ability to serve students' needs. Although 90% of Ohio students attend public schools, those students currently receive only 75% of the state's pool of education dollars while the 10% who attend non-public schools get a 25% share. Siphoning this massive amount of state dollars away from public schools would further undermine educational funding equity and put Ohio even more derelict in our duty to ensure "a thorough and efficient system of common schools" throughout the state as mandated by our Constitution.

Under this proposed expansion of Ohio's voucher program, all students would lose. A universal school voucher program would harm not just the nine in ten students attending our public schools, but also those students whose families do elect to use vouchers. Private and charter schools in Ohio are not subject to the same oversight as public schools, are not held to the same accountability as public schools, and by and large do not outperform public schools. In fact, numerous [studies](#) across the country show very few gains in student achievement. An



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investigation conducted by the [Cincinnati Enquirer](#) found that 90% of all voucher students in the state of Ohio performed worse on standardized tests than students who attended public schools in the same communities. Making the case that expanding vouchers increases quality school options for families simply does not hold up to the evidence.

Moreover, creating a universal voucher program will chiefly serve the purpose of subsidizing parents who are already sending their children to private schools. In this way, this expansion of vouchers essentially represents a tax cut to those who can already afford private school tuition and were already sending their children to private schools in the first place. For Ohio's children with families with the lowest incomes, the Backpack Bill would still likely not enable them to attend private schools of their choosing. Not only is the cost for some private schools still too high but oftentimes private schools are able to be selective in who they accept as a student, opting to choose students with less need of supportive services which can be costly.

Ultimately, this bill moves Ohio in the wrong direction and would funnel a massive amount of taxpayer dollars away from the many for the benefit of the few. The logic underpinning this legislation epitomizes the all-too-frequent phenomenon in decision-making among leaders that has harmed students in the American education system for decades: they blame public schools for failing while doing everything they can to ensure failure. Education is for everyone and should be high-quality and adequately funded for all. Ohio can and must do better by our children by ensuring these dollars go to an investment that will actually improve the educations of all students: the Fair School Funding Plan.

Thank you for this opportunity to give testimony and I urge you to not move forward with HB 11.