

Testimony in favor of HB 339

Jeremy Bickelhaupt, Ottawa County Christian Academy

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and distinguished members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to advocate for House Bill 339.

I write to you today as the administrator of Ottawa County Christian Academy (Oak Harbor, OH), a non-chartered, nonpublic (NCNP) school. We currently serve twenty-six families and seventy K-12 students in Ottawa, Wood, Sandusky, and Lucas Counties. Many of our families struggle to make the financial sacrifice of having to pay tuition for an education they feel is better suited for their children, while also having to support their local school district through taxation. Often this financial burden causes families to withdraw their children from our school despite their desire to keep them enrolled.

Unfortunately, the expansion of the EdChoice program left out a large group of Ohioans, specifically, those choosing to enroll their children at NCNP schools like ours.

An unintended consequence of expanding the EdChoice program to chartered nonpublic schools was the disbanding of some private scholarship organizations. These organizations, like the Northwest Ohio Scholarship Fund (NOSF), have chosen to disband, leaving families who send their children to schools like ours with less funding opportunities. In a letter sent to scholarship award recipients as well as to the benefitting schools, the NOSF championed the EdChoice expansion as a victory claiming their funds are no longer needed because Ohio now has 'universal school choice.'

This year, seven of our twenty-six families qualified for the NOSF awards. Because of the loss of these scholarship opportunities, these families, will have to either make a larger financial sacrifice to continue their child's education with us or they will have to seek another educational option despite their desire to keep their child enrolled at our academy. Ultimately, as much as 'universal school choice' was touted by the EdChoice expansion, it must be noted that this status really is not 'universal' since it leaves NCNP schools out.

I am urging you to extend the educational savings program to parents of non-chartered nonpublic schools through H.B. 339. To claim 'universal' school choice, no Ohioan can be left out. As it stands currently, hundreds of families and thousands of students across our great state need you to support this effort in order to achieve true universal school choice in Ohio.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jeremy M. Bickelhaupt, Administrator | Ottawa County Christian Academy

Oak Harbor, Ohio 43449