

Feb. 13, 2024

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and Honorable Members of the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 339, which would establish the Non-Chartered Educational Savings Account Program.

My name is Maureen Langlois, and I live here in Columbus. I am the mother of two sons, ten and seven, who attend Columbus Classical Academy, a non-chartered private school. I am a registered Democrat, I am not religious, I work in climate change R&D, and I went to Ohio public schools as a child. I just wanted to offer that information particularly to the Honorable Members who are Democrats, to show that this is about academics, not politics.

Where we live in Columbus, our home public elementary school has been rated as 'failing' for over ten years. After investigating lottery public schools, and finding that their teacher-student ratio was still 30-1, and then seeing how they handled COVID with screens, we opted to send our kids to a private school that we could only afford through EdChoice vouchers.

We were uncomfortable but resigned to what we saw our kids doing in school: "learning" math (read: playing games) on Chromebooks, reading comics as literature, being shown movies in the cafeteria for phys ed, and doing social studies through interpretive craft projects. This experience felt like enriched day care. As our oldest son approached higher grades and therefore started needing actual knowledge and skills to scaffold his middle and high school learning, we knew we needed a different solution. Should one of us try to homeschool them? We couldn't afford that, nor would we necessarily be good at it.

Last year, we were relieved and hopeful to discover Columbus Classical Academy. It was everything we'd been looking for—rigorous classes taught by content-area experts using books and paper, and anchored in traditional, time-tested pedagogical methods. They don't rely on computers. They have gym every day; art and music, twice a week. By the time they graduate, my kids will have learned French, Latin, and Greek.

However, we couldn't afford it, because we couldn't use our EdChoice voucher at this new school. Why not? CCA's curriculum, professional requirements, and student testing regime don't align with Ohio Department of Education regulations. (In fact, CCA's standards far exceed those mandated by the Department, which I can discuss later if necessary.)

But we ended up getting lucky: the school needed a Literature teacher, and my co-parent was well qualified to fill their need. That got us a discount on tuition, which is huge, but it's still a heavy financial burden that we couldn't have shouldered if I hadn't also received a promotion at work. My monthly tuition payment is higher than my mortgage—schooling for the kids is the single largest non-housing-related expense in our family. It is worth it to us. We are not really saving as a family, but we are confident that this is a critical investment in our children, and therefore in our family's contribution to the future of the city, the state, and the nation.

As much as I've become an evangelist for what CCA is, and does, for our community and my kids, I can't really advertise this amazing resource to my friends, neighbors, and colleagues because they can't afford it. Their kids are either stuck in public schools or the families are paying as much as they can possibly afford with EdChoice vouchers subsidizing tuition. This predicament unfortunately puts this beautiful, simple, straightforward education out of reach of those who can't afford it.

I am here to encourage you to support the bill because schools like CCA are out of financial reach for most families, but they don't need to be. There is an unfair tip of the scales in the educational marketplace that penalizes the most innovative schools, like CCA, because families cannot use vouchers. With educational savings accounts for non-chartered schools, families can make the choice to send their children to the schools that fit them best. And along the way, allowing innovative schools like CCA to succeed or fail on their own merit, provides Ohio with a network of potentially nation-leading schools that can offer new models for how education can succeed.

I urge the Representatives on this Committee to vote on this bill as currently written. If passed, my family, and more families like us, would be able to afford to send our kids to the best schools Ohio has to offer.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 339. I would be happy to answer any questions.