



OHIO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NETWORK

A Network of Center for Christian Virtue

HB339 Proponent Testimony
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Troy McIntosh, Executive Director
February 13, 2024

Good afternoon Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is Troy McIntosh and I serve as Executive Director of the Ohio Christian Education Network representing 175 Evangelical and Catholic schools across the state. I previously spent 24 in school administration, including 8 at the superintendent level. I stand today to urge your support of HB339.

I won't go to much length today presenting justification for broad school choice programs because this body has already shown that it understands the value of school choice for Ohio's students. The benefits include, significantly higher parent satisfaction rates, improved performance of public school students who choose to remain in their public school, and an overall increase in the level of freedom for Ohio families. This body has shown that a guiding principle should be that when the state both compels the education of its children and controls the content, philosophy, and methodology of that compelled education, it is too much power in the hands of the state. HB339 can help the state solve that inordinate problem.

So instead of presenting a case for school choice, I'd like to address some misconceptions about the bill that you will likely hear.

The first misconception is that this bill, like other school choice programs, will financially devastate already strapped public schools. . Don't believe it. As evidence, in the last ten years, the number of EdChoice recipients has tripled. If this argument is to be believed, school districts' financial positions should be increasingly dire. But in that same period, the [collective cash reserves](#) of Ohio's school districts have more than doubled to \$9.2 billion. That is well over a two-fold increase both in absolute dollar terms and relative terms to their annual expenditures – from 21% in 2012 to 45% in 2022. And this does not even include federal COVID dollars because those are not held as cash reserves.

Even more to the point, because programs like HB339 do not touch any local tax revenue, districts have a fixed revenue source regardless of how many students attend. So as students withdraw to take advantage of a scholarship, the state will continue to fund the schools at their new enrollment levels but the local revenue remains constant as if no students had withdrawn. They receive the same local revenue but for a smaller student population. The public school's per-pupil revenue actually increases as a result.



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The second misconception is that HB339 would fund religious instruction and institutions. The US Supreme Court has falsified this argument with a string of decisions going all the way back to *Mueller v. Allen* in 1983 and re-affirmed in the *Zelman* case in 2002 that originated right here in Ohio regarding the Cleveland Scholarship Program. The court has repeatedly ruled that these programs are not funding religious institutions or exercises because the money is going to the parents and not to the school. The money belongs to the parent and is only incidental that it is used by the parent to pay the school's tuition. Think of it this way, no one claims that WIC payments made to parents to purchase food for their family is funding Kroger or Meijer. No, the money funds the family and it is only incidental that it is used at a particular grocery store. Even if those funds were used at a halal or kosher grocer, no one would reasonably perceive that the state was funding religious institutions or exercises.

A third misconception you will hear is that non-chartered schools have no accountability. They will compare them to a supposed high level of accountability with which public schools must comply. But to anyone who understands accountability, they will know that the accountability that hold us as a standard is faux accountability because there is no consequence for poor performance. What real accountability comes from state testing when parents trapped in poor performing schools cannot take their money and go to a school of their choice? Yet I know from experience as a private school leader, if a parent was dissatisfied with our performance or the education we offered their child, they could take their money and go somewhere else. That's actual accountability. Real accountability will permeate Ohio's educational landscape when parents are given authority to make the decision on where to take their educational dollars.

Educational freedom programs work when students are given a full range of options from which to select – public schools, community schools, chartered non-public schools, and non-chartered nonpublic schools. I urge you support for HB339.