

Good Afternoon Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee.

My name is Erin Finan-DuBois. I'm a mother of 3 children and a special education teacher at Heritage Christian School in Canton.

I'm here to ask for your support for Senate Bill 11 because I deeply believe that parents should be allowed to decide how and where their tax dollars should be applied for education. My politics lean toward progressive, yet I don't believe that public schools should be our only option for children whose parents can't afford the high costs of a private education. My own children benefited from homeschooling for all of their primary and most of their secondary education. The choice to homeschool came with significant financial sacrifice. My husband worked two jobs and I juggled part-time work to make learning at home possible. We took advantage of as many free or cheap educational opportunities as we could find—thank God for libraries, parks, curriculum swaps and other committed homeschool families who scraped together the money so we could all qualify for group discounts at museums and zoos. We paid taxes like everyone else, in addition to paying out of pocket for our kids' educational expenses. I'm happy to say that our hard work paid off and all three of my children graduated from college, with indispensable help from scholarships and student loans. Yet our retirement account definitely suffered as we lived paycheck to paycheck.

My kids are grown, and I work full-time in a profession and a school that I love, without the benefit of a generous public school pension. I did not come to Heritage Christian School because of religious beliefs. I took a job as a reading tutor when I went back to school for my teaching license. Two years later, with a master's degree and a license, I made the choice to stay because of Heritage's unique mission. Our school serves children who typically do not receive the advantages that my own kids were fortunate enough to take for granted: love, attention, consistent meals, and safety. Many of our students find school to be their safe haven. Working with these students is tough, tough work. On any given day, our students may re-experience trauma from the loss of a parent to incarceration, drug overdose, or even just neglect. They may have been moved in and out of districts to stay one step ahead of eviction notices. They find at our small school that we're a second family. Our Biblically-based mission is to teach them that they are beloved, they are wanted, they are precious in God's sight.

That's a message that a lot of parents—single parents, parents living in poverty, grandparents raising their children's children included—want their kids to believe. It's not a message that can be spoken in a public school. I have plenty of good friends and family who want to be sure that religious messages aren't mixed in with their education. I absolutely agree that American citizens must be provided the option of education that does not proselytize or endeavor to promote religious beliefs. But I firmly believe that religious institutions, whether they are Christian or any other faith tradition, have an important place in the American education system.

Capitalism is designed to put money into the hands of consumers and works best when consumers have many choices. Let each center of learning live or die by its own merits. Our

little school has a lot going against it. Our local school district receives \$13,000 to educate each of its students, while we receive about \$8,000 less. Yet every year, we outperform our public schools, meeting the same standards they have to meet.

There is space for us and our mission. Our parents, faculty, staff, and students believe it's a vital mission. We want to prepare our students for the demands of an increasingly complex and competitive world. And we want them to know that God is with them every step of the way. There are 11.78 million residents of Ohio and according to the latest research from the Pew Research Center, 70% of them report attending church at least once or twice a month. 38% every week. Spending time with God is important to a lot of Ohioans. It's a value that families try to instill in their children. I believe that any of those families—and all families, religious or not—deserve to choose whatever type of schooling they want for their kids. My main message before you today is, trust the families. They want the best for their kids even more than you do. It's the parents who are the best judges of whether the schools succeed or fail. It's the parents and families who should be given the right to choose where their educational dollars go.

Thank you for your time.

Erin Finan-DuBois