

Sponsor Testimony-Senate Bill 11
Senate Education Committee
February 18, 2023

Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for holding a proponent testimony hearing on Senate Bill 11, the Parent Educational Freedom Act.

The Parent Educational Freedom Act is extremely important to my family as it would expand the current EdChoice Scholarship to give eligibility to all students in the state of Ohio and would expand the homeschool tax credit from \$250 to \$2,000. I am a parent located in Lewis Center, Ohio, who is extremely concerned about the future success of my child and her education. This bill is key to ensure a successful future of all children. It is essential to see an expansion of the current EdChoice program to include more students and families. Parents know the needs of their children better than anyone else, the Parent Educational Freedom Act would allow parents the choice to send their children to schools that best align with their family needs.

It is to my understanding that this bill will provide \$5,500 for students in grades K-8, and \$7,500 for students in grades 9-12. This would also apply to homeschooling options, which has become more and more popular to many families within Ohio. The \$2,000 homeschool tax credit, as is currently written in the Revised Code, may be used for educational expenses such as books, supplies, software, subscriptions, and other materials that are used directly for home instruction. This is extremely beneficial to those families choosing to homeschool.

It is imperative that the state of Ohio allow parents the ability to control the outcome of their children's education. In my own family's personal experience, the school district my child attends may appear to be doing well, but parents and community members have uncovered some truly concerning issues. We currently live in the Olentangy school district, which is the 4th largest district within Ohio with 23k students. The issues we have experienced extend from lack of transparency with the parents/community to the discrimination of certain groups of students that attend this school district. This is just a small portion of many issues within the district that have been exposed over the last couple of years.

As a family, we have experienced these issues firsthand in Olentangy city schools. This school year, my child walked into one of her classrooms, where walls were filled with nothing but political and activists' symbols. Let me preface this with the fact that this was not a political activist class she was supposed to be attending. Immediately, she felt uncomfortable as this completely went against our family beliefs and values. Multiple communications were shared between the school board members, superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, and me. Some of which were never even responded to. Multiple parents communicated their dismay regarding the unhealthy learning environment this teacher provided, still nothing was done. We ended up dropping the class because administration would not address this teacher and his behavior. In the end, my child had to sacrifice her education because a teacher felt the need to push his political agenda in his classroom setting. This is unacceptable, as no child should ever have to be placed in a situation where they do not feel safe while in school.

The academics of our children have suffered as they struggle to find teachers who want to truly focus on teaching academics, rather than incorporating Critical Race Theory (CRT) or Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into their lessons. This is extremely telling as to what this school district truly focuses on regarding our children and the education they are providing. It appears the kids are running the classrooms and schools. Many teachers along with principals are not properly disciplining children when they violate the student handbook rules. Bullying has continued to get worse, as the children know there are no ramifications for their actions.

As a parent who is experiencing issues with their local school district, I would love the opportunity to send my child to a school that follows through with holding our children, teachers, and administration accountable for their actions, as well as one that cares about providing a safe environment for all students. We have sent multiple communications regarding the many issues identified to our school board and superintendent; nothing is ever done to correct these issues/concerns. Half of the time, parents do not even receive a response back regarding their concerns. As parents, we only want to see our children excel and be provided a learning environment that is conducive for success.

Every parent should have the opportunity to choose a school that is best suited for their child. A family's income should not determine if your child receives the benefits of a good education by attending a school of their choice. Personally, I think the Olentangy school district, along with other public-school districts, could use a little healthy competition. This would hold the school districts accountable for the decisions they make regarding our children and the standards of education they provide. Parents hard earned tax dollars should go to the school of their choice, money should follow the kid not the district. Please consider supporting this bill as this would allow more parents like me the opportunity to make decisions that are best for our families.

Thank you again, for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 11, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Melissa Williams