



Education

Testimony on SB 11 before the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O’Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee of the Ohio Senate:

I represent Policy Matters Ohio, a non-partisan, not-for-profit research organization that is building a more vibrant, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify as an interested party on Senate Bill 11.

As advocates for sustainable and equitable opportunities for all Ohioans regardless of their zip code or what they look like, we believe that protecting public schools and providing a strong education is the foundation of a functioning democracy. Senate Bill 11 would weaken that foundation.

Based on nationwide education week performance rankings, our state currently ranks near the bottom at 46th in equitable distribution of funding. The performance metrics included: (1) state spending by examining, per-pupil expenditures adjusted for regional cost differences, the percent of students in districts with per-pupil spending that is at or above U.S. average, spending index, and percent of total taxable resources spent on education and (2) Equity, by examining the degree to which education funding is equitably distributed across the districts within the state.

More recently the pandemic has contributed to a statewide decline in test scores and a rise in chronic absenteeism. Additionally, over nearly two-decades, we can draw a straight line between the racial and economic achievement gaps in the lack of funding to provide Black, brown, economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities what they need to succeed in school.

How we fund our schools will be the key factor in how well Ohio will be able to educate students for generations to come. The framers of Ohio’s constitution required the state to provide a “thorough and efficient system of common schools” for all students. Yet for many years Ohio lawmakers have provided neither sufficient nor fair distribution of state support. Even as policymakers have expected public schools to do more, they have cut state aid to public schools over time, by allowing it to be eroded by inflation and diversion of funds to charter schools often run by for-profit entities and vouchers. We need to protect our public schools.

Senate Bill 11 is a harmful bill that redirects desperately needed state funds and resources away from public education. By taking our money out of our public schools, certain politicians are allowing private voucher schools to take public funds. The bill also increases the income tax credit for homeschooling families without proposing any additional regulations. Moreover, a majority of voucher recipients are already enrolled in the schools for which they are taking the vouchers. The state is taking taxpayer dollars to give them to families

who can already afford to send their children to private schools. The problem with this legislation is not in giving parents a choice to have their children educated where they see fit but is a rather an issue of priorities. Data shows us that state foundation aid has continually decreased since 2007 when adjusting for inflation, while at the same time state aid to non-public charters and vouchers have been consistently increasing- a more than \$200 million increase in the last two years alone. When we see trends such as these, it makes us wonder which students and which schools are a priority for our legislature?

The legislature would better serve the public by ensuring that we are first; sufficiently funding the categorical components of the Fair School Funding Plan, so that our kids can get the education they deserve. Our public schools and the students they serve need equal resources right now to succeed, not less. Please feel free to contact us with any questions. 614.670.9081.