



SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE – Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 33, 5.31.23

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity provide testimony on provision pertaining to education in House Bill 33. My name is Donovan O’Neil, and I am the State Director for Americans for Prosperity – Ohio (AFP).

AFP believes that our education system should empower people to discover, develop, and deploy their unique gifts and become lifelong learners. While the governor’s proposed expansion of EdChoice eligibility to 400% of the federal poverty level, and the House’s recent further expansion to 450% are noteworthy steps in the right direction, they still fall short of the ideal state wherein families have the utmost flexibility to pursue education opportunities that best fit the unique needs of students. In Ohio, the ability to access an individualized education experience should not depend on living in a failing community. Education opportunity should be available to all students, in all communities.

As this committee continues its deliberations regarding the House version of the Budget, AFP would like to urge the Senate to continue to build on these concepts in the following ways:

1. Expand Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs) to provide greater flexibility to for parents and families to direct funding toward learning opportunities and experiences as they see fit;
2. Lift or significantly reduce eligibility limitations in the existing EdChoice voucher program, effectively making universal education opportunity available to all Ohio students; and
3. Remove bureaucratic barriers surrounding education opportunity programs to ensure an effective implementation of school choice programs and help limit challenges parents may face seeking access to education freedom in the Buckeye State.

States across the country, and some right on Ohio’s doorstep, are rapidly advancing this momentum for school choice and providing more options to students. West Virginia has already taken several steps ahead by implementing a universal ESA through its [Hope Scholarship](#). In the past several months, other states such as Arizona, Iowa, Utah, Arkansas, and Florida (with bipartisan support) have done the same. Universal school choice is an idea whose

time has come, and it will help students, families and employers around this state better meet their unique needs in an ever evolving, rapidly changing world.

With respect to monies that are strictly state dollars, meaning no federal funds or other dedicated revenues, the House-passed version of HB 33 adds nearly \$7 billion in new spending from the end of fiscal year '22. With ample revenue available to pursue bold school choice reform, stopping at 450% of FPL for EdChoice eligibility would be a lackluster final result during this budget cycle. Pursuing a school choice policy with a universal element is a fair and reasonable approach because it affords opportunity to all and treats all Ohioans as equals under the law.

AFP Ohio has staff in Dayton, Perrysburg, Cuyahoga County, Steubenville, and at several points between engaging with activists and community members, and this is an issue that affects them directly and that is highly personal. People deeply care about their children's futures and their families' financial prospects. Please prioritize them, your constituents, during this Budget by reducing and eliminating barriers to opportunity and success so that Ohioans can have the best possible chance to thrive and live up to their full potential.

Thank you again, Chairman, for the opportunity to convey this message to the committee, and I would be happy to do my best to answer any questions the committee might have.

Americans for Prosperity (AFP) exists to recruit, educate, and mobilize citizens in support of the policies and goals of a free society at the local, state, and federal level, helping every American live their dream – especially the least fortunate. AFP has more than 3.2 million activists across the nation, a local infrastructure that includes 36 state chapters, and has received financial support from more than 100,000 Americans in all 50 states. For more information, visit www.AmericansForProsperity.org.