Interested Party Testimony on HB 9
Conference Committee on HB 9 | February 20, 2020
Howie Beigelman, Executive Director, Ohio Jewish Communities

Chairman Jones and Members of the Committee:

Background & Statement of Interest

Ohio Jewish Communities is the statewide government advocacy, public affairs, and community relations voice of Ohio's eight Jewish federations and their approximately 150 Jewish agencies, including Jewish community day schools across Ohio.

For every one of our agencies, including our schools, Jewish reflects our values, and not those we serve. You have already, or soon will, hear testimony from a parent who chose one such school because it both provides a grounding in Jewish tradition as well as a place to break down stereotypes and engage the broader community.

We submit this testimony today as truly "interested parties" on behalf of all our individual schools, but especially so on behalf of each of our school families and every one of our students.

Education is a prime Jewish value

Historically, the Jewish communal commitment to education has been seen in the most unlikely places: Nazi ghettos, Allied displaced persons camps, and under Communist persecution. In fact, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes "to defend a country, you need an army. But to defend a civilization, you need schools." It is why he writes, throughout Jewish history, schools have been "our citadels" and teachers our "greatest heroes."

So at the heart of the matter, this is about educating every single child in our state to the best of our - and their personal - ability. Our state's future does depend on it.

EdChoice as it affects Ohio's Jewish day school students

With that in mind we note EdChoice has been a lifeline for Jewish families in Ohio as well as many of our non-Jewish neighbors. Some are those who are in a public school that doesn't meet their needs. But for all, it is about parents who struggle to make the right choices for their children.

We know too that EdChoice has even worked to attract middle class residents to move from other high cost states without such programs. That is, while its primary purpose and need is to secure the best education for any specific child, its impact is not only an educational choice program, but a community and workforce development one as well.

The solution must work for public and nonpublic schools alike

We as an organization, as a movement of Jewish federations, and as a community remain solidly pro public school. We believe this should not be and indeed, is never, a zero sum or either/or game. We as advocates and you as policymakers can find a way to:

1. Fund public schools
2. Fund these necessary scholarships to nonpublic schools
3. Reform the report card
4. Reform other policy issues.

In fact, the Jewish Federation system as a whole is one that demonstrates what a force multiplier and value-add strong nonprofits can be when partnering with government to serve those in need. Our agencies serve people from cradle to grave, in collaboration with government. We see it in our preschool and after school programs, in our workforce development and job training opportunities, in our mental health services, our senior living options, and more. Perhaps nowhere is our value-add as obvious as in K-12 education.

So our parents, and our children, urge you to find the appropriate dollars needed and to reach across the aisle and to the opposite chamber to make this work. We are ready to work with you on it too.

Thank you. We would welcome any follow up and to respond to any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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Ohio Jewish Communities