



Catholic Conference of Ohio

Larry Keough
Catholic Conference of Ohio
House Finance & Appropriations Committee
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I. Introduction

Good evening Chairman Amstutz, Vice Chair Carey, Ranking Member Sykes and Committee members. My name is Larry Keough. I am the associate director in education at the Catholic Conference of Ohio and advocate on behalf of the 430 Catholic schools serving more than 132,000 students.

We appreciate the opportunity to speak to each of you today because Catholic and other chartered nonpublic schools represent about 10-11 percent of the state's K-12 students and continue to provide an important contribution to Ohio's overall educational system.

HB 153 has generated much discussion about education reform along the line of inputs and outcomes while attempting to deliver a cost-effective approach for our state. In many respects, Catholic schools are a proven model in that they are accountable on the front end – complying with Ohio's Operating Standards as prescribed by the State Board of Education – while producing successful outcomes. In analysis of the OGT, close to 90 percent of 10th graders in Catholic schools test at or above proficiency in all five tests:

- Math;
- Science;
- Reading;
- Writing;
- Social Studies

And, in this era of soaring educational costs, Catholic schools still provide an affordable product while saving the state of Ohio considerable savings. Consider that it costs an average of \$10,000 for students to be educated in public schools. This means that for every child educated in a Catholic or other chartered nonpublic schools, there is an average savings of \$10,000, less the state aid of approximately \$972 in fiscal year 2011, which includes \$15 million in partial restoration dollars that the 128th General Assembly appropriated.

II. State Aid

As each of you know, state aid is appropriated through two line items – GRF 200 511 – Auxiliary Services – and GRF 200 532 – Administrative Cost Reimbursement. Auxiliary Services are funds from the state to school districts in which chartered nonpublic schools are located. Auxiliary

Services provide students with student resources such as remedial math and reading tutors, special learning therapists and services for other students with special needs. These funds are also used to purchase instructional resources such as secular books, materials and computers.

Through the Administrative Cost Reimbursement Program, chartered nonpublic schools may receive direct reimbursement for some of the costs associated with complying with state, federal and local mandates. As indicated in the Governor's Executive Budget, these two programs provide "basic aid" to every student attending a chartered nonpublic school.

There was a longstanding practice for Ohio to treat the percentage increase or decrease for Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Reimbursement in the same manner as that for traditional public K-12 public school students receiving state aid.

But after this practice was broken in 2008 and 2009, each of you seated on this committee within the legislative body passed SB 181, which dispersed in the 2011 fiscal year \$15 million in partial restoration to Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Reimbursement.

We greatly appreciated the bi-partisan support for the restoration dollars because the legislative body was attempting to move us closer to the pre-cut levels by building those dollars into future budgets such that the cuts are eventually offset.

Although HB 153 provides a 1.4 percent increase and a 1.5 percent increase in fiscal years 2012 and 2013 for both Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Reimbursement, it does not calculate the \$15 million in partial restoration dollars. As a result, there is a net loss of 7.2 percent in fiscal year 2012 and a 5.8 percent loss in fiscal year 2013 for both of the line items.

III. Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program

We continue to steadfastly support the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program. Ninety percent of the schools participating in this storied poverty-based school-choice program are Catholic.

Although the CS&TP is the second longest-standing school choice program in the nation, we would like to recommend a few adjustments that would put the program in line with the EdChoice Scholarship Program.

First, we are recommending that the scholarship awards for the Cleveland Scholarship Program are equal to the EdChoice scholarship amounts of \$4,250 for K-8 students and \$5,000 for high school students.

Secondly, we ask that the scholarship awards the actual scholarship amounts as in EdChoice, not a percentage of these amounts, by eliminating the 75 percent and 90 percent limitations on CSTP scholarship. Currently, CSTP amounts are the lesser of the following:

The actual tuition of the chartered nonpublic school or \$3,105 (90 percent) of the \$3,450 scholarship for students below 200 percent of poverty for grades K-12. A 75 percent scholarship is \$2,587.50 of the \$3,450 scholarship amount for students who are over the 200 percent poverty level.

Third, we ask that high school students become eligible for first-time CSTP scholarships. Presently, students who reside in Cleveland and meet the poverty criterion can't receive a first-time scholarship when entering ninth grade. We recommend that high school students be permitted to be a new scholarship recipients as they can in the EdChoice Program.

IV. EdChoice Scholarship Program

We continue to support the EdChoice Program. Approximately 70 percent of the students receiving an EdChoice Scholarship attend a Catholic school.

We have recommended that the cap in the program be raised or lifted to accommodate additional families. Catholic schools may be able to accommodate additional families, but clearly nonpublic schools other than Catholic schools would have to provide seats for the program to meet the new threshold as set in HB 153.

V. Pending School-Choice Legislation

The Conference is on record in support of two pending school-choice bills. HB 136, Parental Choice and Taxpayer Savings and SB 88, tax credit scholarship legislation. We ask that HB 136 be included in the House budget bill because it reaches out to the poor and vulnerable by providing scholarships to working poor and middle-income students, as well as special needs children who have the plight of overcoming a documented disability.

The Autism Scholarship Program in Ohio established a precedent for children within the pervasive spectrum disorder to be eligible to receive the services they needs in the schools of their parents' choice.

The special education scholarship in HB 136 is modeled after the Autism Scholarship Program in Ohio. The special education scholarship in Rep. Matt Huffman's legislation is affording special needs students who are not autistic to have the same opportunity to receive a state sponsored scholarship to attend a school of their parents' choosing.

In advocating and helping to implement the McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disability in Florida, I saw first-hand that many special needs children only need a change of schools with loving-caring teachers to truly make a difference in their lives. The special education scholarship in HB 136 could have a markedly similar impact on many disabled children in Ohio.

We look forward to working with each of you within the Finance Committee in the weeks ahead.

Conclusion

At this time, I would welcome any questions.