



Education

**Testimony on HB 33 before the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee**

**Tanisha Pruitt, Ph.D.**

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 nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization that is building a more vibrant, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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. Some of the proposals in House Bill 33 would strengthen that foundation. Others would undermine it.

The House proposal improves on the executive budget in two ways. The Senate should retain both changes. By updating base costs estimates from FY18 to FY22, you would increase overall foundation funding, leading to a 12.1% increase in per-pupil spending. And by freeing up \$388 million that had been earmarked for school resource officers, you would allow districts greater flexibility to hire nurses and counselors to provide mental health services to their students, which most districts say they need more than armed police in their schools.

These would be policy wins for Ohio kids. However, some areas need adjusting. For example, although teacher starting salaries were updated in the House budget from \$30,000 to \$40,000, that is not enough to mitigate Ohio's educator shortage, especially if they have or want to raise a family. A [2022 study by the Economic Policy Institute](#) found that Ohio teachers were underpaid by about 14% relative to other comparable college-educated workers. The Senate should increase the minimum teacher salary to at least \$50,000, the rate recommended by the Ohio Education Association — and include additional funding for raises throughout the pay scale, to avoid wage compression.

Voucher eligibility and state aid to vouchers continue to threaten our ability to equitably fund our schools.

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, allowing it to be eroded by inflation and diverting funds to vouchers. The legislature has a responsibility to protect and support Ohio's public schools.

Increasing the EdChoice eligibility threshold from 400% to 450% FPL creates a virtually universal voucher system that will provide nearly any student public money to attend a private school, regardless of whether the student had ever attended a public school or had any need for a public subsidy. This steers the state away from the initial purpose of vouchers, which was to subsidize only low-income students. Now even students whose families can afford to and have been sending their students to private schools can do so with taxpayer dollars. In FY 24, voucher programs are expected to redirect \$783 million of public resources away from public schools. In FY 25, that figure reaches \$852 million. The bill also increases the income tax credit for homeschooling families without proposing any additional regulations, despite troubling revelations about what is considered an acceptable homeschool curriculum.

Voucher policy is a question of public priorities and responsibilities. Data show 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 sufficiently funding the categorical components of the Fair School Funding Plan, so our kids can get the education they need and deserve. Our public schools and the students they serve need more resources, not less. Please feel free to contact us with any questions. 614.670.9081.