

Chairman Sturla and Members of the House Democratic Policy Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of school choice.

My name is Phil Gernovich, and I have been the Principal and now Headmaster of Erie First Christian Academy for seven years.

Many students have benefitted greatly from attending Erie First Christian Academy. We are a private Christian school that started in 1993 with a vision to educate young people in developing a world-view that is distinctively Christian. We are a unique academy that is currently educating 257 students from early education to high school seniors. We represent 225 community students and 32 students from ten different countries. We provide housing to our boarding students.

We are a quality Christian educational institution that prepares students for the next level. The students that start here can finish anywhere. We have had five graduating classes. Over 90% of our graduates have or are attending higher education. Over 25% of our students will have college credit prior to their high school graduation.

EFCA is accredited through Association of Christian Schools International and Middle States. We employ 27 full time and 8 part-time employees. All of our teachers have college degrees and/or teaching certificates. All of our teachers receive continued training throughout the year. Our teachers could teach anywhere but they chose to teach in a private Christian school. They have chosen to invest in the lives of young people. We have qualified teachers who uphold state standards and more.

Our school offers cores classes to every student in every grade each year. The core classes consist of Math, English, Social Studies, Science and Bible. We offer general and advanced classes. Among the advanced classes are Calculus, Physics, Chemistry, and a variety of AP classes. We are also involved with the Regional Choice Initiative. The RCI program is a dual enrollment program that allows our students to receive college credit in high school. We offer a variety of elective classes as well. Some of these are art, music, driver's education, SAT prep., Newspaper, foreign languages, Financial Peace and computer classes. We offer after school co-curricular activities. These activities include of athletics, clubs, drama performances and musical programs.

School competition is healthy. America is founded on competition and choice. Businesses have succeeded and failed because of these attributes, but the business industry has greatly benefited. It will do the same for Pennsylvania schools. Competition will increase the productivity and test scores in many schools. Pennsylvania school students could do better on the College Board exams. Healthy competition will breed better schools. EFCA does extremely well in this area. We test each student from first grade to eleventh with the Stanford Achievement Test. Each class average is higher than the state averages. Some of our classes

are more than a year ahead. Families should be able to choose the best school for their children.

Our families have chosen Christian education for a multitude of reasons. Perhaps it is for a quality education or maybe the choice is to expose their children to an environment that has God in education. Perhaps parents desire an education for their children with a biblical world view. It is my job to share with prospective families who we are, what our vision is, the quality we offer, the success of our alumni, our core values, what can be expected of our academy. Then families make a choice. They choose whether to send their student here or somewhere else. Sometimes our school is not what they are looking for, and sometimes it is exactly what they desire. People want choices.

Many students have benefited from attending EFCA. Many more students could also benefit if funds were available to them. We are in favor of Senate Bill 1 and in increasing Education Improvement Tax Credit. We live in a Christian nation that allows citizens to choose where they can buy shoes but cannot choose where to send their children to school.

Respectfully,

Phillip A. Gernovich

Headmaster