

RESOLUTION NO. 15-2020 (CRR)

By Council Member Russell

A Resolution opposing the state's unconstitutional school funding system and the current method of funding Educational Choice Scholarship Program vouchers by the Ohio General Assembly; and declaring an emergency.

WHEREAS, the City of Cleveland Heights has a long and important tradition of being home to many of Ohio's best public and private schools, all of which serve their students with great distinction; recognizing that the current Educational Choice Scholarship Program ("EdChoice") funding model is financially unsustainable for all of them; and

WHEREAS, with no testimony, and no prior notice, the Ohio General Assembly added last-minute amendments in January 2020 regarding the expansion of EdChoice vouchers before approving the State's biennial budget; and

WHEREAS, just 18 months ago, only 30 Ohio districts had schools designated for EdChoice (just five percent of the total number of districts across the state), but today, thanks to this action by the General Assembly, 70 percent of districts in Ohio have schools designated for EdChoice; and

WHEREAS, much of the data used to make the new EdChoice determination is five or six years old and came from assessments the state no longer uses or is considering changing; and

WHEREAS, because the current measures to determine and designate EdChoice-eligible schools are disconnected from real performance of those schools, Cleveland Heights High School was found to be an EdChoice-eligible school despite having recently been distinguished by The College Board as one of nine school districts in Ohio and the only district in Cuyahoga County to join its prestigious Advance Placement ("AP") Honor Roll and having a graduation rate above the state average for the past two years; and

WHEREAS, Ohio General Assembly froze public school budgets and, at the same time, took more money away from public schools by increasing the numbers of students eligible to receive EdChoice vouchers; and

WHEREAS, the state's overall approach to funding public schools is problematic and the expansion of EdChoice vouchers is just one element of the flawed system; and

WHEREAS, the state's school funding system creates an overreliance on local property taxes and places a crushing economic burden on cities like Cleveland Heights, which in turn hampers our ability to retain and attract residents and businesses; and

WHEREAS, beginning as early as 1997, the Ohio Supreme Court has on three occasions declared the state's school funding system unconstitutional and ordered the state to remedy the

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violation by creating an entirely new system; and

WHEREAS, state lawmakers have failed entirely to enact a constitutionally-permissible school funding system, in spite of the Ohio Supreme Court's orders.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, that:

SECTION 1. This Council demands immediate financial relief be provided to all Ohio school districts impacted by EdChoice vouchers and that the state not deduct EdChoice payments from local school district funds and that it should instead directly pay for all vouchers or scholarships.

SECTION 2. This Council urges all lawmakers in the State of Ohio to refrain from further action that will lead to an increase in the tax burdens of local communities and further urges the state to remedy its school funding system as ordered by the Ohio Supreme Court.

SECTION 2. Notice of the passage of this Resolution shall be given by publishing the title and abstract of its contents, prepared by the Director of Law, once in one newspaper of general circulation in the City of Cleveland Heights.

SECTION 3. This Resolution is hereby declared to be an emergency measure immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety of the inhabitants of the City of Cleveland Heights, such emergency being the timely need to oppose the expansion of EdChoice vouchers by the Ohio General Assembly. Wherefore, provided it receives the affirmative vote of five (5) or more of the members elected or appointed to this Council this Resolution shall take effect and be in force immediately upon its passage; otherwise, it shall take effect and be in force from and after the earliest time allowed by law.

JASON S. STEIN, Mayor
President of the Council

SUSANNA NIERMANN O'NEIL
Acting Clerk of Council

PASSED: February 18, 2020