

The Columbus Dispatch coverage of the Coalition/VHO response to Representative Jamie Callender's HB671 which would punish school districts for joining the effort to challenge the constitutionality of the EdChoice Voucher program.

The Dispatch article picked up on the Coalition/VHO press conference theme of the "Bully Bill." Since all of the public outrage in response to the Bill, as introduced, the sponsor has been singing a different tune by reducing the amount the state would steal from Coalition/VHO member districts; however, any plan less than complete withdrawal of HB671 is unacceptable to the Coalition,

Shared frustration

Ohio districts, advocates say new bill 'bullies' anti-voucher coalition

Grace Tucker and Cole Behrens Cincinnati Enquirer | USA TODAY NETWORK

Public school districts across Ohio are speaking out against a Statehouse bill they say is designed to force them to stop fighting the state's school choice voucher program in court. House Bill 671, introduced by Ohio Rep. Jamie Callender, R-Concord, would strip state funding for any public school participating in lawsuits against the state's EdChoice voucher program. The bill was introduced on Feb. 2 and has been referred to the Ohio House Finance Committee.

In 2022, 100 public schools sued over the private school voucher program. That coalition, called Vouchers Hurt Ohio, has since tripled in size to over 300 public schools across the state. In June 2025, the group won a lawsuit after a Franklin County judge ruled that using public funding for private school education was unconstitutional. The state has since appealed the decision.

At its Feb. 12 press conference, William Phillis, executive director of the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding, which is behind Vouchers Hurt Ohio, said the legislation was "purely an intimidation tactic."

"And that intimidation tactic didn't work," Phillis said. "So in a sense, Representative Callender has given us a gift – he raised public attention to the egregious nature of this kind of legislation."

Callender could not be reached for comment.

Ohio Senate President Rob McColley, R-Napoleon, said some Republican lawmakers had expressed concerns that school districts were using state funding to sue over vouchers. He said the legislature was confident the state would be successful in its litigation.

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"There has been some frustration shared among some of my Republican colleagues that we've been funding these state institutions and that they are using the very funding we are providing them to sue us on this stuff," McColley said.

Advocacy group calls legislation 'School Bully Bill'

At a Feb. 12 press conference at the Ohio Statehouse, public school advocates dubbed HB 671 the 'School Bully Bill' and said it was an attempt to silence public schools fighting for school funding in the court system. They said billions of dollars of state education funding would be cut off if this bill became law.

Mark Wallach, the attorney representing Vouchers Hurt Ohio, said Callender's bill "is not a serious piece of legislation."

"And I'm confident we would be able to have it quickly declared unconstitutional (if it were to pass)," Wallach said.

Eric Brown, former chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court and former longtime board member of Columbus City schools, said the bill was “laughable.”

“This bill is outrageous and doesn’t belong in the legislature,” Brown said.

“This is something that has to be fought. I have every confidence that suburban schools, urban schools and rural schools will fight this and ultimately I think we will win.”

Eve Bolton

board member for Cincinnati Public Schools

“Representative Callender is trying to bully and intimidate our local school districts – and it won’t work.”

Jocelyn Rhynard, Dayton City Schools board member, said the bill was a “slippery slope” and should be concerning to any other local entities that may sue the state in the future.

“We the people of Ohio elect people to run our cities, townships, counties and school boards and we ask them to be good stewards of our money and to look out for us,” Rhynard said. “And that means at times it is the right thing to do for the taxpayer to sue the state government.”

School districts across state push back on bill

Mike Brown, a spokesperson for Columbus City Schools, the state’s largest district and a participant in the lawsuit since 2021, said the proposed legislation is an attempt to silence hundreds of districts by “unconstitutionally limiting Public Schools’ right to advocate for students’ best interests.”

“CCS is focused on taking education to a higher level, but that means the state must live up to its legislated promise to fully fund the Ohio school formula,” Brown said. “HB 671 will not fairly fund a single textbook, lunch or teacher to improve education for students and seems designed to silence 300+ local districts, likely including those in the representative’s own district.”

It does not appear that any public schools in Callender’s northeast Ohio district are participants in the lawsuit, but several adjacent districts are involved in the suit.

Eve Bolton, board member for Cincinnati Public Schools, Ohio’s secondlargest district, spoke out against the bill in a Feb. 9 board meeting, saying there’s “strength in numbers” among the hundreds of districts challenging vouchers in the lawsuit.

CPS joined the lawsuit in 2022 in a board resolution that stated “vouchers disproportionately benefit non-minority students” and drive a “drastic and massive influx of public funds to private schools.”

“This is something that has to be fought,” Bolton said about Callender’s proposal. “I have every confidence that suburban schools, urban schools and rural schools will fight this and ultimately I think we will win.”

CPS’s treasurer Michael Gustin estimated during the meeting that \$156 million of the district’s funding, or a quarter of its annual budget, is at risk under the proposed legislation.

The potential withholding of state funds is an attempt to “silence our voices and punish the children of our district,” CPS’s board president Brandon Craig said in a statement to The Enquirer.

Bolton suggested that Callender’s bill is the latest in a string of actions by Columbus “that are specifically designed to interrupt, disrupt and deny public schools in the state of Ohio.”

Superintendent Chad Springer of Athens City Schools in Athens County said that the district needed to fight for public education at a time when districts are struggling to manage costs and their share of state

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funding is decreasing. Additionally, he said southeast Ohio lacks access to private schools that EdChoice vouchers benefit.

“The majority of our taxpayers are paying tax money to support private schools in larger cities that our students would never go to,” Springer said. “A portion of our taxes are going to cities that are benefiting from (private schools), whereas public education is the education of southeast Ohio.”

USA Today Statehouse news bureau reporter Jesse Balmert contributed to this report.

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