

**Ohio Capital Journal's David DeWitt shreds Speaker Matt Huffman's feeble and flawed arguments that there is already enough accountability imposed on private schools and that infringing on a private business is his concern.**

Speaker Huffman's response to legislation that would require the state to make private voucher schools subject to public accountability and transparency shows the Speaker's blind allegiance to the state's voucher scheme which he has ruthlessly thrust through the legislature for decades. As DeWitt points out in a June 1, [Ohio Capital Journal](#) article, Ohio taxpayers deserve transparency and accountability for the billions of tax dollars currently flowing into a black hole.

**Ohio taxpayers deserve accountability and oversight of \$2.5 billion being sent to private schools**

**[David DeWitt](#)**

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Ohio taxpayers are sending [\\$2.5 billion](#) to private and religious schools while Ohio public schools deal with the fallout of a [\\$3 billion budget shortfall](#).

Even if you think taxpayers should be forced to send money to religious institutions, despite the separation of church and state enshrined in the [first clause of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights](#)...

Even if you think state lawmakers should be funding this separate system of private education in Ohio propping up religious institutions and private business with taxpayer dollars, despite the [Ohio Constitution](#)'s clear mandate for funding one public system of common schools and explicit prohibition against religious sects controlling any part of those school funds...

And even if you don't mind that most of the new recipients of this taxpayer-funded public money [never attended public school](#), and it's OK with you for taxpayers to [subsidize the private school tuition of well-to-do families](#) while [nearly 90% of Ohio K-12 students do attend public school](#)...

At the very least, at the bare minimum, don't Ohio taxpayers deserve a receipt?

An invoice? An accounting of the bill of goods and services rendered?

Some independently audited way to compare and contrast their local public schools taxpayers are funding to the private ones that taxpayers are also funding?

Don't Ohio taxpayers deserve transparency, accountability, and oversight of \$2.5 billion in our money that is being handed over by our state government leaders to private schools and religious institutions?

A bipartisan group of Ohio lawmakers thinks so, and they've introduced a proposal that would dramatically increase transparency over Ohio's private school voucher programs.

Among a dozen provisions offered by state Sens. Bill Blessing, R-Colerain Township; Kent Smith, D-Euclid; and Rep. Justin Pizzulli, R-Scioto County, [Ohio Senate Bill 443](#) would audit how state dollars are spent in two of the state's private school voucher programs, create report cards for academic performance, and require students to take the same end-of-course exams that public schools mandate.

Private and religious schools accepting the vouchers would have to submit weekly attendance records, conduct criminal background checks of its employees, report the tuition and fees charged by the school in a five-year cost trend, report how many of their students have an Individualized Education Program, and publish their dropout and graduation rates.

Ohio public schools face significant oversight from the state on their budgets, on their performance, on their curriculum, as it should be. It makes sense: They're funded by taxpayer money and taxpayers deserve oversight and accountability.

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So why shouldn't private and religious schools that are also taking taxpayer money also be subjected to oversight and accountability?

After all, taxpayers are taking a risk on investment. It hasn't always worked out well. Ohio taxpayers were [ripped off by hundreds of millions of dollars](#) when the [ECOT for-profit, private online charter school scheme crashed and burned in 2018](#).

As a concept, it seems like a no-brainer that \$2.5 billion in Ohio taxpayer money deserves transparency and accountability.

Unfortunately that is not a no-brainer for Ohio House Speaker Matt Huffman, R-Lima.

Nearly as soon as the bipartisan proposal was introduced, Huffman threw cold water on it.

But Huffman's arguments against transparency and accountability are far too weak to carry the \$2.5 billion Ohio taxpayer burden they labor under.

Huffman's first claim is that the best argument that there already is enough accountability is the fact that parents already send their children to these schools.

I'm not sure why that means that those parents don't still deserve independently audited information on academic performance, graduation rates, attendance records, and accountability testing on par with public schools.

Comparison shopping would be far easier with independent apples-to-apples comparisons. Why don't those parents deserve that? Huffman doesn't say. We're left to wonder.

Huffman's second claim is that he has concerns about infringing on a private business. He neglects to mention that this is a private business taking public money.

You see, Huffman's justifications would only make sense if a private family was using their own private money to pay a private business. That's not the case.

These are private families using public Ohio taxpayer dollars to pay a private business or religious institution.

The use of public money demands public accountability far beyond the personal views of the parent using the public's money at the public's expense.

And privacy against public oversight for the business or religious institution stops when they dip their hands in the public honey jar.

If the issue was the contracting of home health services with Medicaid money, would Huffman make the same argument? The services have all the accountability they need because families are using them? The service agencies are private businesses and we don't want to infringe on the privacy of a private business, even though they're accepting huge amounts of public money?

'Seems like pretty weak sauce.

'Seems like pretty poor reasoning for the state government of Ohio to abdicate responsibility and oversight over billions of dollars in taxpayer money being handed out to private institutions.

If you are going to open up the public coffers for private business, Ohio taxpayers deserve transparency and accountability at the very least. This is as simple and basic as it gets.

If state leaders are going to continue to deny Ohio taxpayers that basic transparency and accountability over our own money, then taxpayers deserve a far more intelligible argument than Huffman has been able to offer.