

Community Block Grants

My name is Ari Klein. I live in Cleveland Heights, teach math at Cleveland Heights High School and am president of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union, which maintains an office at Lee and Mayfield. I am also the co-convenor of the Heights Coalition for Public Education along with Susie Kaeser. The Coalition is an advocacy group for public education that stands against privatization of public resources and is against standardized testing.

My knowledge of community block grants, that this group is responsible for screening, is limited. My impression is that these grants are to help improve the quality of life, thwart poverty, build infrastructure, spur economic development and encourage job creation.

If these impressions are correct, then I believe that safeguarding our public schools from sources that will drain public funds aligns perfectly with those purposes. When public funding sources are diverted to private and parochial schools then I believe the community suffers. Fewer dollars are available while being responsible for the same number of children means that those children are getting less – plain and simple. When public dollars are diverted it requires the public district to ask for more money through levies more often. So, as an example, CHUH school district passed an operating levy a few years ago that generates about \$5.5 million per year. At the same time, state money that meant to contribute to the operating costs of the district are being diverted to students we do not serve. In the March 5 year forecast that the CHUH district produced, Fiscal Year 2018 shows a loss of \$2.9 million to charter schools, \$3.75 Million to EdChoice Vouchers,

and another \$2.4 Million for Petersen and Autism vouchers. These losses total over \$8 million, which means that if these funds were not being diverted than there would have not been a need for the last levy – basically, residents of our communities are paying for children to go to a parallel public system of charters. We are paying for children to go to the parochial and private schools that have always been a personal and financial choice for families, and students with special needs that could be served by the public system are going to unregulated providers who coach parents on the most costly identification to label their own children.

If these types of diversions of public funds are encouraged, then it prices some people out of being able to live in our community and creates a division among people who do not have children at home - wondering why the schools need as much money as we do. This misuse of tax dollars risks a deterioration of one of our most important infrastructures in the community and its largest employer – the school system. Many school employees, like myself, live in the community. Creating instability in the public system will lead to job loss, loss of residence, and a worsening of a 20% community poverty rate.

I would ask that this committee carefully consider the harm to the public school system when making recommendations to city council on block grants. Public monies should be used for the common good. Please ask the questions of those requesting block grant funding if the design for their block grant will encourage and strengthen our public schools or harm them.