

**Pennsylvania State House of Representatives
Public Hearing, Appropriations Committee
November 16, 2023**

**Written Testimony submitted by:
Mrs. Besie Katz, Head of School Politz Hebrew Academy (Philadelphia, PA)**

Honorable members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives :

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today and share a perspective about educational opportunity for students in Pennsylvania. My name is Besie Katz, and I am the Head of School at Politz Hebrew Academy in Philadelphia. We are a K-8 school located in the Rhawnhurst area in the northeast.

We are a Jewish day school and I'd like to share with you who our students are. We have ESL learners who themselves have immigrated to Philadelphia from other countries. We have a population that is nearly all Free or Reduced Lunch eligible. We have students with learning differences who we have been able to serve by stretching our resources and because of the goodwill and hard work of our teachers. We have families who have moved from out of state to the Philadelphia area purely because of access to Jewish day schools like ours.

It is an absolute honor to be able to offer all of these children this education, and we believe that all students should have opportunities that align with their needs and that position them for success in life.

We are endlessly grateful for Pennsylvania's commitment to student success, namely through the availability of the EITC and OSTC programs. These programs are what make our special school accessible to students who probably just do not fit somewhere else. These programs are part of the vision of an educational landscape that really levels the playing field for students with financial need to be in the classroom that best suits them. These are also programs that make education a partnership, between the commonwealth, our districts, and our citizens who are incentivized to not only support their local public schools through their taxes but also to invest in the array of educational institutions in their own locales if they so choose.

In terms of recommendations to improve the EITC and OSTC programs, we would like to see a more streamlined, efficient process, which could be accomplished with a fully online portal. A frequently updated online portal would resolve issues and questions that DCED and DoR managers must address constantly. Our scholarship organizations and donors wait weeks for letters, despite approvals weeks earlier. The agencies often ask for repeat submissions, and documents are not in a format that they can be automatically saved or printed. The two agencies often do not have updates from the other. Shifting to an online database and communications system would make the application and awards process much simpler for both the agencies, scholarships organizations and businesses.

I will include additional data and information on the process at the upcoming hearing.

Thank you.