Good afternoon, my name is Ilen Perez-Valdes, and I am here today to testify in favor of this bill. I am from Miami, Florida, and I am here because I personally benefited from a school choice program. My mother was an immigrant who understood the importance of a quality education. However, as a single mother, she faced significant financial hardships and struggled to provide for our family. At the same time, I was diagnosed with three autoimmune disorders as a child. During the school day, I needed medications and treatments to keep my health as stable as possible. Unfortunately, the public school I was initially zoned to attend could not accommodate my medical needs or consistently provide the medications and treatments I required during the school day. As a result, I was hospitalized and had to repeat kindergarten. My mother knew I needed a different environment, one where I could receive both the medical support and the education I deserved. School choice gave her that opportunity. Through a school choice scholarship, I was able to attend a private school where a nurse could help manage my medical needs and my teachers understood my health challenges and limitations. For the first time, I had an educational environment that allowed me to focus on learning while receiving the support I needed to stay healthy. School choice changed the course of my life. Today, I attend the University of Miami, where I am pursuing a degree in Psychology and Public Relations. I am the first in my family to attend university, and I know that the opportunities I have today were made possible, in large part, by the educational opportunity my mother was able to find for me. I am sharing my story because I believe every child deserves the opportunity to receive an education that meets their individual needs, regardless of their family's income or circumstances. I have heard people argue that school choice does not serve students with special needs or families facing financial hardships. But I am standing here today as someone whose experience demonstrates why educational options can matter so much. School choice gave me access to an

environment where I could receive the support I needed to learn, grow, and pursue my future. I am not here to say that every child needs the same educational environment. I am here because I believe every family should have the opportunity to find the environment that works for their child. No child should have to choose between receiving the medical support they need and receiving the education they deserve. Thank you for your time and for allowing me to share my story. I am happy to answer any questions.