



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler, Associate Director of Education Policy
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: February 21, 2023
RE: LB705 (Distribution of Lottery Funds for Education) (Support)

Chairwoman Murman and members of the Education Committee,
The Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church and advances the Gospel of Life through engaging, educating, and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public.

The Church's Second Vatican Council, in its *Declaration on Christian Education*, recognized the following: "The family which has the primary duty of imparting education needs the help of the whole community. In addition, therefore, to the rights of parents and others to whom the parents entrust a share in the work of education, certain rights and duties belong indeed to civil society, whose role is to direct what is required for the common temporal good. Its function is to promote the education of youth in many ways, namely: to protect the duties and rights of parents and others who share in education and to give them aid; [and] according the principle of subsidiarity, when the endeavors of parents and other societies are lacking, to carry out the work of education in accordance with the wishes of the parents[.]"¹

These principles underlie our support for LB705.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference appreciates the continued allocation of lottery funds to education programs that benefit all students and all teachers. Programs like "Door to College Scholarships" and "Career Readiness" and "Community College Gap Assistance" are all positive. In particular, we appreciate the continued funding of the Access College Early (ACE) Scholarships Cash Fund and the Excellence in Teaching Cash Fund. These programs provide students and teachers, regardless of the school they attend or work in, the opportunity to pursue their educational training.

While the Catholic school students and teachers are not a major proportion of the overall beneficiaries of these two programs, the funding is nevertheless important and helps qualifying students and teachers.

We are grateful for the assistance these programs provide to our students and teachers and we think it is important to take note of the Nebraska Opportunity Grant Fund. In 2021-2022, NOG

¹ *Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian Education*, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965, §3, accessible at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html.

provided over \$22 million in scholarships for over 13,000 predominantly low-income students to attend a public or private college or university of their choice.² Notably, NOG does assist students who choose to attend a private, faith-based college or university. NOG recognizes the supplemental needs that many families and students have in pursuing their education and provides a mechanism for the state to assist those in need.

Because of the widespread support of NOG and programs like it, we encourage members of the Education Committee to consider avenues that assist more low-income families pursuing an education that is best for them at the elementary and secondary levels. For instance, scholarship tax credit programs like LB753 have an array of public policy benefits and recognize the primary right and responsibility of parents to direct the education of their children. They also generate a savings to Nebraska's taxpayers while preparing students with the education they need to participate in our state's civic and economic life.

We would encourage the Education Committee's support of LB705. Thank you for your time and consideration.

² <https://ccpe.nebraska.gov/nebraska-opportunity-grant-nog>