



TO: Education Committee  
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler  
Nebraska Catholic Conference  
DATE: January 30, 2023  
RE: LB519 (Certification Fees, Excellence in Teaching Act, Student Teaching Act)  
(Support)

Chairman 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.

On behalf of our 112 schools and over 2500 certificated teachers, the Catholic Conference is here to support Senator Walz's LB519. We also thank her office for being eager and responsive partners as we worked through the bill's language to create consistencies for all of Nebraska's teachers and potential teachers.

LB519 does several helpful things for educators. First, the elimination of certification fees is a boost for teacher morale and pocketbooks. Having paid certification fees numerous times myself, and having heard the grumbling in teacher workrooms, I can say this measure would be celebrated by teachers. Furthermore, as we exit the pandemic, we know that tens of thousands of teachers hung in there through COVID for our kids; waiving certification fees seems timely and appropriate.

Secondly, LB519 creates the Student Teaching Assistance Act, which provides a forgivable loan up to \$8500 per student teaching semester if the teacher meets the qualifications laid out in the bill. Student teaching is an exhilarating but exhausting time as one nears graduation, struggles to make ends meet financially, and enters the job market. This all occurs as student teachers are taking on more and more classroom responsibility. As a principal I was a guide and mentor to many student teachers and empathetic to the overwhelming nature of this time because I remember how it consumed my own life when I was becoming a teacher. As we confront teacher shortages, it is justifiable to mitigate one of the financial issues future educators face.

In regard to the qualifications for loan forgiveness, the Conference has requested an amendment related to Section 14(b). The initial language regarding enrollment in a graduate program within six months of obtaining one's undergraduate degree was unclear. We had concerns about the potential scenario in which \$8500 in loan forgiveness requires taking on \$15,000-\$20,000 in graduate school debt. In short, we do not believe LB519 should mandate graduate school enrollment.

Finally, the NCC supports the inclusion of nonpublic educators in the one-time allocation of grants to all Nebraska school teachers. The Conference has recommended a simplified formula

for allocating these funds because basing the amount on census data seems to miss the point: all teachers in every location work very hard on behalf of Nebraska school children.

We again thank Senator Walz for introducing LB519 and appreciate her collaboration to create a bill supporting all of Nebraska's school teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration!