



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler, Associate Director of Education Policy
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: February 7, 2023
RE: LB153 (Extraordinary Increase in Special Education Funding) (Support)

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.

In Gravissimum Educationis Pope Paul VI declared, “All children, in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education adapted to their ability.”¹ In this spirit the Nebraska Catholic Conference supports LB153.

Nebraska Catholic schools have a rich history in special education and embraced serving children with disabilities as early as 1870.² Prior to and during the time public schools were building their programs, school districts contracted with Catholic schools to provide the best care possible for children with disabilities.³ As an important aside, this history continues today⁴ as a handful of Nebraska public school districts contract or work with Catholic schools for their children with needs.⁵

However, we understand most children with disabilities are served in public schools. This is due both to the volume of students in public schools and to the legal obligation of such schools to serve students with disabilities.⁶ Yet, Nebraska Catholic schools serve many children with disabilities in our schools (12%⁷), and also partner with public schools to serve children in our buildings.⁸ This is all to say that the Catholic Conference and our 112 Nebraska Catholic schools understand that properly serving students with special needs is as expensive and unpredictable as it is urgent and necessary.

Senator DeBoer’s LB153 creates capacity to serve children with disabilities more completely and that’s something all Nebraskans should rally around.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Gravissimum Educationis, Pope Paul VI, 1965

² Saint James Orphanage: A History of a Home for Children

³ Whitepaper: “A Catholic History of Special Education in Nebraska” – joint diocesan effort

⁴ <https://www.boystown.org/OneBoysTown/Pages/Services.aspx>

⁵ <https://madonnaschool.org/programs/>

⁶ <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History>

⁷ Diocesan reporting

⁸ <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/questions-and-answers-on-serving-children-with-disabilities-placed-by-their-parents-in-private-schools/>