



TO: Revenue Committee
FROM: Tom Venzor, Executive Director
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: February 6, 2025
Re: LB509 (Opportunity Scholarships Act) (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. I would like to express our support for LB509.

Every child deserves an education best suited to their individual needs. Unfortunately, not every parent is financially capable to choose an education that is best for their children. While our Catholic parishes and schools across Nebraska tirelessly work to provide an affordable education for every child who knocks on our doors, we also cannot deny reality: there are more low-income families seeking a Catholic education for their children than there are scholarship opportunities.

LB509 incentivizes private contributions to nonprofit organizations that must turn nearly all donations into education scholarships for low-income students. By advancing LB509, you will provide thousands of low-income families with true freedom to choose the education best suited for their children, as we have already seen from the one-year implementation of LB753 passed in 2023. That program benefited over 1600 students to enter the non-public school of their choice.

There are now, as of 2024, over 81 school choice programs across the United States. These programs have 1.2 million children participating in them. The simple fact is that school choice is growing in popularity and effectiveness, especially as more and more parents demand that their fundamental right to direct the education of their children be honored by the state.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph 2229) states: “As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to *choose a school for them* which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental.... Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise.”

LB509 is a sensible and just exercise of the state’s recognition that parents are the primary educator of their children, and that they should be assisted in selecting a school that is best for their children. LB509 becomes even more important because it is targeted to serve those most in need: those experiencing poverty, the working poor, and the working middle class. It also assists those who are vulnerable and deserve heightened attention, such as students with special education needs, those who’ve experienced bullying or harassment, and those who have been rejected by the public school system.

We all know that children get one chance at their K-12 education. LB509 ensures that Nebraska's children most in need of school choice can access a life-transforming educational experience—all while making fiscal sense for Nebraska. We hope this committee advances—once again—this policy to provide thousands of children another pathway toward a better tomorrow.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference respectfully urges your support of this legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration of our position.