



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler, Associate Director of Education Policy
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: January 31, 2023
RE: LB673 (School Mapping Grants) (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.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference supports the concept of LB673. We'd also like to note an important issue in the bill, and offer suggestions to improve the execution.

Catholic schools in Nebraska serve over 27,000 students with 2500 dedicated educators. Just like their public school colleagues, Catholic and nonpublic school students must be kept safe. As a matter of fact, the government has a profound duty to keep the citizenry safe. This responsibility especially applies to school children and educators; it requires vigilance and equity.

LB673 takes that obligation to heart by providing grants to help cover the cost of mapping schools for first responders. Encouraging this work is important, and we appreciate that the bill does so without the use of a mandate. With that in mind, we want to communicate a flaw in the bill and then offer suggestions.

- **Constitutionality:** We appreciate that Senator Hansen included nonpublic schools in LB673 but the funding mechanism presented in Section 1(4) is unconstitutional. Nonpublic schools in Nebraska cannot receive direct funding from the government. The families we serve may receive such funding, and our schools may receive services rather than dollars, but we cannot receive direct funding. The suggestions below include ideas to solve this problem.
- **Suggestion One – Funding Route:** The Conference recommends either collaboration with ESU's (all of them, including those serving LPS and OPS), or redirecting the funding of this bill to the State Patrol.
 - ESUs are built to serve all the schools in their areas. Their ability to handle funding and pay vendors takes a burden off of schools and removes the risk of nonpublic schools receiving state funding.
 - Our preferred delivery model is the latter – State Patrol. By sending money to the State Patrol the experts are now in charge of the process and schools. This also creates consistency in practices across the state.
 - In either case – ESU or State Patrol – their direct handling of state funds removes the issue of constitutionality.

- Suggestion Two – Funding Source: Using ESSER dollars, which are likely already committed, quickly leads to a depleted pot. With deadlines for obligation and allocation looming, this is a very tenuous pot of money. Lottery funds may be a better resource.
- Suggestion Three – Ownership: Ownership of the map should reside with the law enforcement agencies and schools. A third party vendor should not be the owner of the map because this creates security issues and could delay first responders if they are required to access the map through the vendor.
- Suggestion Four – Combine with LB516 to create a comprehensive school safety bill accessible to all Nebraska schools.

In closing, we are excited to see creative and collaborative school safety approaches. LB673 is a practical idea that looks to keep all Nebraska students and educators safe. We thank Senator Hansen for his work on this bill and his open ear to our suggestions.

Thank you for your time and consideration!