



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: January 30, 2023
RE: LB603 (Alternative Certification for Teachers) (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.

With 112 schools, nearly 27,000 students, and over 2500 certificated teachers, Catholic schools in Nebraska educate over 70% of nonpublic students in the state.¹ And like our colleagues in other nonpublic and public schools, we face teacher recruitment and retention issues. The teacher shortage issue is universal², and so we thank Senator Linehan for presenting LB603 for discussion.

Like all Nebraska schools, Catholic schools demand high quality individuals. We believe the key to addressing the teacher shortage involves a process that maintains a high bar while creating a wide path to certification. Teaching in Nebraska should be about excellence, but access should not be cumbersome. We support legislation that strengthens these precepts. With that in mind, we do offer a suggestion for LB603 at the conclusion.

LB603 creates an alternate pathway to teacher certification for those who possess a bachelor's degree and successfully complete an alternative teacher certification program. This program must have been in existence for at least 10 years and operate in at least five states. The prospective teacher must take a subject area and pedagogy exam. The applicant must meet background check requirements. Virtually every state has some form of alternative certification and such approaches have only grown in response to teacher shortages.³

An argument against LB603 may be that teachers who take this alternative route are not qualified in the same way as those who take the more traditional route.⁴ This is a reasonable concern but I'd note that this bill incentivizes folks with bachelor's degrees to enter teaching. In my experience these are often "second career" professionals that help our buildings with their professionalism and various experiences. Also note that while LB603 could provide more

¹ Annual reporting by Archdiocese of Omaha, Diocese of Lincoln, and Diocese of Grand Island

² https://omaha.com/news/local/education/teacher-shortage-worsening-across-nebraska-state-report-says/article_0dfad018-9dd2-11ed-93a4-ff7b65261258.html

³ <https://www.teachaway.com/blog/can-you-become-teacher-without-teaching-degree>

⁴ <https://www.teachercertificationdegrees.com/alternative/#faq>

diversity and depth in the hiring pool, there is no mandate to hire an alternative teacher. Administrative teams at the local level can judge who is the best fit for their school.

A suggestion of the NCC is related to teacher mentorship. The Catholic Conference would advocate for explicit language requiring a teacher mentor for at least two years.

In closing, the teacher shortage is a real issue that will take dynamic ideas coming from multiple angles to remedy. LB603 is a good step in this regard.

Thank you for your time and consideration!