



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Tom Venzor, Executive Director
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: February 1, 2026
RE: LB742 (Jr. High Student-Athlete Participation High School Sports) (Support)

The Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church through engaging, educating, and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public. The NCC is offering neutral testimony on LB742, which would allow junior high students to participate in high school athletics under certain conditions.

While the NCC's position on legislation is, typically, clearly support or oppose, LB742 was subject to varying opinions among high school athletic directors and other school leaders. A few were supportive, while others were indifferent. Yet others were opposed, with some vehement in their opposition. Because of the mixed reactions, the NCC would like to communicate this varied feedback we received for the Education Committee's consideration.

Feedback in support of LB742's concept hit on the following arguments.

- This could be helpful to smaller schools, particularly in rural communities, to help field enough students for practices or competitions.
- This could increase a school's ability to participate in a particular sport, especially if student participation would make or break the school's ability to field a team.
- Some students, more so girls given their earlier maturity, are mentally and physically capable of playing high school athletics.

Feedback in opposition to LB742 was encapsulated by the following arguments.

- Allowing junior high students to participate in high school athletics could displace and discourage high schoolers from participating in a sport because they know or fear other, younger students will take their position or be given more opportunity. This could be particularly true for freshmen or junior varsity athletics.
- Junior high students are not mentally prepared to participate in the longer high school athletic seasons.
- This could exacerbate the already pre-existing recruiting problems that occur with high school athletics, particularly in the Omaha metro.
- Except for a few matured junior high athletes, this could risk the health and safety of some students in certain high contact sports (like football).
- In schools where student participation is not an issue, this would be a largely unused policy.
- The legislature should not legislate or mandate on this topic, and should leave this issue to the NSAA and its member schools to create a uniform policy that anticipates the various intricacies that may occur between communities, different classes and sizes of schools, and health and safety concerns.

We thank the Education Committee for its consideration of our views on this matter, and we thank Senator McKinney for the conversation this legislation has generated.