



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: February 8, 2021
RE: LB322 (School Safety and Security Reporting Act) (Support)

Chairwoman Walz 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 Catholic Conference and our three diocesan superintendents appreciate LB322 for three reasons.

- 1.) Collaboration: This is a multi-partnership collaboration to do what's right for kids and schools.
- 2.) Early Intervention: Senator Williams has done his homework on this bill and has put a premium on early intervention and an efficient system to keep kids safe.
- 3.) Diversity of Schools: The crafters of this bill listened deeply to the needs of diverse types of schools.

Regarding collaboration, LB322 asks the community to unite to keep kids safe. It says, "This is not my student or your student, it is our student." With 114 Catholic schools sprawled across the state serving 27,000 students, the safety of our young people is vital to us. However, just as precious is the well-being of our friends and loved ones in other nonpublic and public schools. The feeling is reciprocated I'm sure, and this bill covers us all in a cooperative community-focused manner that puts kids first regardless of school, parish, LEA, or ESU boundary lines.

On the topic of early intervention and restorative practices, an early lesson for me as a classroom teacher occurred when I asked for a quick conversation with a high school sophomore whose grades were abysmal. After some hemming and hawing he said, "Mr. Ekeler – how do you expect me to learn when I'm not even sure I'm safe?"

What a question. What a sad reality for so many of our schoolchildren. What are we to do?

One answer is that we intervene as early as possible for kids in need. When you look at the nuts and bolts of LB322 you'll find a bill completely focused on early intervention to restore safety and security with a team of educators and counselors.

It's about purpose, not punishment.

Finally, LB322 provides enormous peace of mind to over-worked educators who often feel they are on an island. As you can see from the map of nonpublic schools, many of our schools reside in remote areas. It's a boost for an educational leader to know a system is in place to keep kids safe. Even better, as we mentioned, is that you've got partners in this work all around you. I am so happy that the crafters of this bill brought the Catholic Conference to the table to discuss how LB322 could wrap its arms around every school and student.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference thanks Senator Williams for carrying this bill. We also appreciate the cooperation between all the entities involved. And we are proud that one of our non-public schools has been a leader in this venture: Thank you to the Boys Town staff for providing a successful model.

We encourage advancement of LB322 from the committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration!