



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler, Associate Director of Education Policy
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: February 23, 2021
RE: LB5 (Purple Star School) (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.

On behalf of over 27,000 Catholic School students in 112 schools, we support LB5 – the Purple Star School Act. Schools *may opt into* the program by completing tasks that welcome military families and their children:

- Designate a point of contact in the school for military families and children
- Identify eligible kids in the school
- Determine appropriate school services available to these students
- Maintain a web page of resources, contacts, and information regarding
 - Relocation to, enrollment at, registration at, and transfer of records to the school
 - Academic planning, course schedule, advance classes
 - Have a “transition” program led by students to help kids enter the school
 - Professional development of point of contact (staff is also offered opportunities, though it is not mandatory for them)
- Complete at least one of the following
 - Post a resolution supporting military connected students and families
 - Recognize April as Military Child Month, or November as Military Family month
 - Partner with local military installation so that military members may speak to, visit with, or host students

Catholics comprise the largest religious affiliation of our nation’s military - 20%-25% in any given year¹. And we know many military families value Catholic schools, a feeling that the schools in our three Nebraskan dioceses reciprocate in a special way.

For instance, Saint Mary’s PK-8th grade school in Bellevue was founded in 1947 and saw an explosion of enrollment as military families moved into the area.² Today Saint Mary’s is a leader in celebrating military child month each April, and cooperates with Offutt in presenting materials to the Airman and Family Readiness Center to welcome new families. They are a model school for how educators, families, and the military can join forces for children.

¹ <https://www.hsdll.org/?view&did=716143>

² <http://www.stmarysschoolbellevue.com/about-us/our-history>

Saint Matthew's in Bellevue is also a Nebraska gem. The school's history reads, "St. Matthew School is the only school in the world built principally through the generosity of military members for the education of their children. In 1961, Father Ruef, the senior Catholic Chaplain at Offutt Air Force Base, undertook this school building project when he learned Strategic Air Command (SAC) Headquarters was projected to gain several hundred Catholic families."³

Finally, these comments from Pius X High School principal and military spouse Mrs. Leah Bethune are impactful: "LB5 includes things that many schools should be doing for our military families. In Lincoln we have one army and one Air Guard base with yearly deployments. A program like this is a big step forward for those schools who opt in – I know firsthand that it could truly ease the burden a military family feels during difficult times."

In closing, the Nebraska Catholic Conference supports LB5 because of the Catholic tradition of supporting military families, and because the program is not a mandate. On this last point, we appreciate that LB5 allows various community stakeholders to support families by choice and with resources (as opposed to mandated with financial burdens).

Thank you for your time and consideration!

³ <https://www.stmatthewbellevue.net/history>