



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: February 8, 2021
RE: LB389 (Military Teaching Spouse) (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.

Catholic author, theologian, and convert G.K. Chesterton astutely made the following observation: “The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”

Knowing that the guiding force for American troops is their loving family standing behind them, we support LB389 – a bill welcoming the teaching spouses of military to Nebraska. This bill allows military spouses with an active and valid certificate of at least one year to teach in Nebraska immediately (The NDE Teacher Certification page currently states that Nebraska requires at least two years of teaching experience of such person).¹

Furthermore, it seems to be a clear initiative of the U.S. Department of Defense to create streamlined and consistent guidelines for teacher reciprocity of military spouses as they move from state to state.² This is a unique situation for military families, and the Catholic Conference thanks Senator Sanders for this bill.

While ranked 37th out of 50 in overall population, Nebraska has the 17th highest Catholic school enrollment in the United States.³ This includes over 27,000 students and 2000 dedicated educators. Many teachers and families move to Nebraska for the opportunity to teach nonpublic school children (of which there are a total of nearly 40,000). Our state’s tradition of school excellence – both nonpublic and public - draws families and educators to “The Good Life.”

Catholics comprise the largest religious affiliation of our nation’s military - 20%-25% in any given year⁴. And we know many military families value Catholic schools, a feeling that the schools in our three Nebraskan dioceses reciprocate in a special way.

¹ https://dc2.education.ne.gov/tc_interactive_teaching2/TeachingMilitaryPermit.aspx

² <https://ednote.ecs.org/teacher-license-reciprocity-for-military-spouses/>

³ https://www.ncea.org/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Enrollment_and_Staffing/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Enrollment_and_Staffing.aspx?hkey=84d498b0-08c2-4c29-8697-9903b35db89b

⁴ <https://www.hsd1.org/?view&did=716143>

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.⁵ Today Saint Mary's is a leader in celebrating the month of the military child 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 statewide in how educators, families, and the military can join forces for children.

Saint Matthew's in Bellevue is also an absolute 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."⁶

These Catholic school stories of support for military education are special, but not unique as many of our 114 Catholic schools host military families and retirees around the state. It should come as no surprise that we support LB389 and other legislation that is friendly to armed service members and their families.

Beyond the impact on military spouses, LB389 creates a fresh angle of attack in confronting both the current and predicted future of teacher shortage issues Nebraska faces. Teacher recruitment and retention are universal issues that impact all Nebraska schools. Programs that keep standards high while efficiently welcoming teachers to Nebraska will be vital to solving the problem. We feel LB389 is one of those unique angles, and we encourage members of the education committee to vote this bill out of committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

⁵ <http://www.stmarysschoolbellevue.com/about-us/our-history>

⁶ <https://www.stmatthewbellevuene.net/history>