



Chairwoman Walz and members of the Education Committee,

Hello - I am Jeremy Ekeler (J-E-R-E-M-Y E-K-E-L-E-R).

I am the Associate Director of Education Policy for the Nebraska Catholic Conference. 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 Church's Second Vatican Council, in its *Declaration on Christian Education*, recognized the following: "The family which has the primary duty of imparting education needs the help of the whole community. In addition, therefore, to the rights of parents and others to whom the parents entrust a share in the work of education, certain rights and duties belong indeed to civil society, whose role is to direct what is required for the common temporal good. Its function is to promote the education of youth in many ways, namely: to protect the duties and rights of parents and others who share in education and to give them aid; [and] according the principle of subsidiarity, when the endeavors of parents and other societies are lacking, to carry out the work of education in accordance with the wishes of the parents[.]"¹

These principles underlie our support for LB529.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference appreciates the continued allocation of lottery funds to education programs that benefit all students and all teachers. In particular, we would refer you to the continued funding of the Access College Early (ACE) Scholarships Cash Fund and the Excellence in Teaching Cash Fund. Both of these programs provide students and teachers, regardless of the school they attend or work in, the opportunity to pursue their educational training.

While the Catholic school students and teachers are not a major proportion of the overall beneficiaries of these two programs, the funding is nevertheless important and helps qualifying students and teachers.

Though we are unquestionably grateful for the assistance these two programs provide to our students and teachers, we also think it is important to take note of the Nebraska Opportunity Grant Fund. In 2018-2019, NOG provided almost \$18 million in scholarships for predominantly low-income students to attend a public or private college or university of their choice. Notably, NOG assists students who attend a private, faith-based college or university. NOG recognizes the

¹ *Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian Education*, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965, §3, accessible at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html.

supplemental needs that many families and students have in pursuing their education and provides a mechanism for the state to assist those in need. As many acknowledge, the benefits of this policy to the State of Nebraska are unquestionable.

We would encourage members of the Education Committee to further consider other avenues that could assist more low-income families to pursue an education that is best for them at the elementary and secondary levels through the support of legislative proposals such as tax credit scholarships (LB364). Like NOG, scholarship tax credit programs have an array of public policy benefits, such as recognizing the primary right and responsibility of parents to direct the education of their children, generating a savings to Nebraska's taxpayers, and preparing students with the education they need to robustly participate in our state's civic and economic life.

We would encourage the Education Committee's support of LB529. Thank you for your time and consideration.