



To: Judiciary Committee
From: Tom Venzor, Executive Director
Nebraska Catholic Conference
Subject: LB 139 (Adopt the COVID-19 Liability Protection Act) (Support)
Date: February 18, 2021

Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Tom Venzor. I am the Executive Director of the Nebraska Catholic Conference. I would like to express our support for LB139.

The Catholic Church in our state consists of hundreds of thousands of members, over 400 parish churches, over 100 elementary and secondary schools educating nearly 30,000 students, several universities and college seminaries, and nearly two dozen hospitals and nursing homes. More directly, the Nebraska Catholic Conference represents the mutual public policy interests Nebraska's three Bishops serving in the Archdiocese of Omaha, the Diocese of Lincoln, and the Diocese of Grand Island. Between these three dioceses, there are employed over 6,000 employees across 340 separate legal entities.

The Catholic Church—like so many other businesses and non-profits—has been working tirelessly this last year to ensure our doors remain open to the people of Nebraska. We have done this in a way that is safe and adheres to health measures crafted by medical and public health experts and governmental leaders. Our goal has been and remains protecting Nebraskans with a safe environment for worship, learning, and charitable service to their neighbor.

Despite our ongoing and vigilant efforts from the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also been acutely concerned with threats of frivolous lawsuits which could impact our various ministries. Many of these ministries have been under tremendous financial pressures because of the loss of, among other things, charitable giving. This concern has grown in recent months when many of our parishes and schools were notified that our main insurance provider would no longer ensure coverage for "communicable disease exposure" related to pandemics.

We have regularly collaborated with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to seek liability protections in one of the federal COVID relief packages. But this effort has been to no avail. Because of federal inaction, we now turn to our state legislature for much needed liability protection.

LB139 provides important limited and reasonable safe harbor protections for non-profit entities, like the Catholic Church, which comply with COVID-19 health and safety standards. The legislation provides continued opportunities for legitimate claims to be brought for serious injury or death where there is gross negligence or willful misconduct. In short, LB139 strikes an appropriate balance for businesses and non-profits which are doing their due diligence to keep our communities and economy strong and healthy.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference respectfully urges your support for LB139. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ARCHDIOCESE OF OMAHA * DIOCESE OF LINCOLN * DIOCESE OF GRAND ISLAND

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