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Proponent/HB 200
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Introduction –Good afternoon Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and Committee Members. My name is Suzanne Lester. I am the principal of Elyria Catholic High School.

Background – I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about scholarship assistance at Elyria Catholic High School. Elyria Catholic is a chartered nonpublic high school located in Elyria, the county seat of Lorain County. Over the past 69 years, Elyria Catholic has graduated more than 8,900 young men and women. We are proud of the impact we have had not only on the city of Elyria, but on the county and beyond. In the last three years, 99.1% of Elyria Catholic’s graduates have either entered the armed forces or been accepted at community or four-year colleges. Additionally, the past three graduating classes have earned college scholarship assistance in the amount of \$19,865,831, or an average of \$62,866 for every graduate. Recent Elyria Catholic alumni frequently visit their alma mater and proudly share that they are more than prepared for the rigors of college.

As has happened in many parts of our great state, the opportunity for an outstanding education has become more difficult to obtain as communities, economics, and ultimately household finances have changed. During the last five years from April 2010 to July of 2016, according to the United States Census Bureau, the median household income in the city of Elyria dropped from \$41,408 to \$40,952. This reflects a 1.1% decrease in household income in the city. A large number of Elyria Catholic

parents are working middle-class working families - nurses, teachers, police and firefighters. Unfortunately, these circumstances make it more and more difficult for families to make Elyria Catholic High School a reality for their children. Although the EdChoice Scholarship allows 16.8% of current students the opportunity to attend Elyria Catholic, our high school tuition of \$8,200 makes it out of reach for many families in our community. These families deserve to have the opportunity to make the educational choice for their children they feel is best.

Our school's mission reads, *Committed to excellence and compassion, Elyria Catholic High School is a Christian community within the Catholic tradition that calls young men and women to embrace their faith, recognize their full potential, and establish a life-long relationship with Jesus Christ. Through worship, academics, extracurricular activities, and service, the Elyria Catholic community educates students to use vision and courage to act as caring, just, and responsible citizens of the world.*

Our students are reminded of our mission each day as they recite the pillars of Excellence, Compassion, Faith, Tradition, and Community. Our school's mission and its pillars define who we are and what we hold dear to our hearts.

When Elyria Catholic students are asked, whether by prospective families, business partners, or friends of Elyria Catholic, what they like the most about being a student at EC, their responses are, undoubtedly, one word - family. Our students are prepared for their futures. Faculty and staff have ignited a passion for learning by creating a culture that fulfills our students' potential through disciplined studies and dedicated teaching in a nurturing environment. Our current scholarship students, in particular, experience much success in this environment. Our small, caring, Catholic

community allows students to feel confident asking teachers for help - in the classroom, before or after school, or in an extracurricular or athletic activities. Although parents are the primary educators of their children, our faculty and staff members work closely with parents to provide a true home away from home.

Our students are involved. Over the past three years, nearly 85% of students participated in athletics and extracurricular activities. Of our current scholarship students, 97% are involved in those same activities. We celebrate the unique gifts of our students, helping them to become their very best selves and encouraging all to find and pursue their own path to achievement. We give them support to allow them to discover their individual academic, extracurricular, athletic, social, and spiritual gifts.

And although the environment is nurturing, the academic studies are rigorous. One of the reasons our students are so well-prepared for college is because we expect more from them. During the previous three years, our ACT scores have consistently been higher than the State of Ohio average by 1.7 points. In fact, the scholarship students from the Class of 2017 had a composite score that was 0.7 higher than the average of the class as a whole. All students are challenged to go beyond Ohio's learning standards to think critically, act justly, and make strong, positive contributions to our world. Additionally, students' school days are naturally extended through homework that is assigned each night, and students are held to a higher standard through a higher grading scale than those that are set at most other schools.

As part of our Ohio Catholic Schools Accrediting process, EC's Catholic identity goal involved utilizing the Gospel values and the five pillars to help students exemplify an increased understanding of diversity. In all areas of that were measured, student

acceptance of international students, non-native English speakers, people with differing religious beliefs, and people with differing ethnicity or heritage, increased, sometimes as high as 23.9% from freshman to senior year. Through diversity in our school community, all students benefit - both those that are on scholarship and those that are not. Elyria Catholic encourages students to value their faith learning as the foundation for their lives. We challenge students to live their faith every day - to give back with kindness, compassion, courage, and confidence in service to God, family, and community.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer any questions.