



Catholic Conference of Ohio

House Finance Subcommittee on Education (HB 33)

Larry Keough/Catholic Conference of Ohio

March 16, 2023

Good morning Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and Committee Members. My name is Larry Keough. I am the associate director for the Catholic Conference of Ohio and legislative advocate for 367 Catholic schools educating more than 109,000 students.

Catholic schools represent the largest system of nonpublic schools in Ohio. Our schools hold a valid charter issued by the State Board of Education and maintain compliance with the Operating Standards requiring that students receive a general education of high quality.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Catholic Conference of Ohio have championed parental choice in education for decades.

The Conference steadfastly supports all six of Ohio's school-choice programs:

Cleveland Scholarship Program;
Ed Choice Scholarship Program;
Autism Scholarship Programs;
Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program;
Ed Choice Income-based Expansion Program;
The Tax Credit Scholarship Program.

Catholic schools are essential to the implementation of these programs.

As of FY 22:

71 percent of the Ed Choice scholarship students are enrolled in Catholic schools;
60 percent of the Ed Choice Expansion students are enrolled in Catholic schools;
75 percent of the Cleveland Scholarship students are enrolled in Catholic schools;
Nearly 50 percent of the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship students are enrolled in Catholic schools.

Most of our students are from working poor and middle-income families. They may be at-risk for one reason or another, have a varying disability, and/or be merit scholars.

Nearly one-third of our students are minorities. African American and Hispanic students represent approximately two-thirds of our minority students.

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But all of our children share a common bond. Once children are enrolled in Catholic schools, they are **Catholic school students**, regardless whether their parents pay full tuition, or they receive parish subsidies, diocesan discounts, or state-sponsored scholarships.

Our support of school-choice programs is predicated upon the Catechism of the Catholic Church that expressly states:

“As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental.”

In keeping with this right, we ask for your support of the Governor’s proposed increases for family income to 400 percent of Federal Poverty Level for the Ed Choice Income-Based Scholarship Program.

The Conference also has advocated for many decades what we consider essential staples for Catholic and other chartered nonpublic school and students.

These staples are:

GRF 200 511 Auxiliary Services, established in 1967;
GRF 200 532 Nonpublic Administrative Cost Reimbursement, established in 1981;
School Transportation for chartered nonpublic school students, established in 1966 with the Fair Bus Bill Act.

These longstanding programs are a testament to the Child Benefit Theory. That is, what crosses the line between Church and State is the student.

Auxiliary Services Funds may be provided to school districts to provide education services, instructional materials and equipment for chartered nonpublic schools located within a district. Education services include but are not limited to tutoring, guidance counseling, nursing, special education, gifted programs and security services.

Or, chartered nonpublic schools may opt for direct funding from the state for these services and equipment.

Our Request for Auxiliary Services: Support the Executive Budget’s proposed 2.7 percent funding increase in FY 24 and 2.4 percent funding increase in FY 25.

Nonpublic Administrative Cost Reimbursement -- Catholic and other chartered nonpublic schools are reimbursed for complying with local, state and federal mandated administrative and clerical costs. Schools are reimbursed for the number of claims they.

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file to document compliance. In FY 22 and FY 23, schools were reimbursed, on the average, \$434 per pupil.

Our Request: Support the Executive Budget's proposed 2.7 percent funding increase in FY 24 and 2.4 percent funding increase in FY 25.

The prior budget bill, HB 110, represented a record investment in K-12 education for public schools, chartered nonpublic schools and students and families across Ohio. We are grateful for so many of the budgetary increases and policy features within that budget bill.

But one area especially needs attention.

Funding levels in the Categories of Disabilities for the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program have been flatlined or received modest increases. In contrast, the scholarship amount in the Autism Scholarship Program increased from \$27,000 to \$32,445 in HB 110 of the 134th GA. This is 20 percent increase. Our Request – Increase categories 1-6 in the JPSNSP by 20 percent and if the Autism Scholarship Program is further increased in HB 33, then increase the JPSNPS categories by the same percentage for parity.

Scholarship Granting Organizations – Two years ago in HB 110, the Ohio Tax Credit Scholarship Program was established that allowed tax payers to donate to a Scholarship Granting Association and receive a tax credit.

Our request is to increase the donation for an individual taxpayer from \$750 to \$2,500 and for joint couples from \$1,500 to \$5,000. Although we are grateful for the program, the cap or limit on taxpayers is too limited. Other states such as Florida, Arizona and Pennsylvania have a much higher cap for dollars to be donated to a Scholarship Granting Organizations, which award scholarships with preference to low-income students.

School Transportation – Ohio is one of the few states in the Midwest that provides school transportation to Catholic and other chartered nonpublic school students. But in recent years as a result of COVID related issues and bus driver shortages, school districts are declaring impracticality to transport our students in which parents can receive a modest payment in lieu of transportation.

Please consider the following recommendations:

First, district owned vans are utilized to transport special needs students who are enrolled in public schools. Our request is for chartered nonpublic school students to be transported in district-owned vans if school buses are not practical due to cost or number of school buses available.

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Secondly, school transportation is afforded to public school students whose disability per their Individual Education Plan requires transportation as a related service. Our request is to provide transportation for chartered nonpublic school students on the basis that their Individual Education Plan, or Individual Service Plan, or Academic Support Plan requires that they be afforded school transportation as a related service.

Thank you for your favorable consideration.

At this time, I am pleased to answer any questions.