



CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee

Larry Keough/Catholic Conference of Ohio

Proponent/SB11

Feb. 21, 2023

Good afternoon Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram 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.

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.

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.



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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 won convictions. This right is fundamental.”

It then follows public policies should affirm the primary role of parents with meaningful choices in where and how their children are educated.

In Pope Francis’ 2016 exhortation, *The Joy of Love*, he reaffirmed the importance of parental rights in education, “Parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions.”

Indeed, parental rights in education remain an essential aspect of the Church’s teaching that the family must be strengthened as the central social institution of society.

We appreciate Sen. O’Brien sponsoring the Parental Educational Freedom Act. It is the next step in the school choice movement by expanding the eligibility for Educational Choice scholarships.

If the year were 1995 and the General Assembly were attempting to favorably pass Ohio’s first school-choice program, then SB 11 would probably be ahead of its time.

But SB 11 is before this committee after 28 years of school-choice incrementalism in Ohio.

We respectfully request favorable passage of this bill.

At this time, I would be pleased to answer any questions. Thank you.