CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Senate Bill 290
Interested Party Testimony
Senate Education Committee
April 14, 2026

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram**,** and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide Interested Party testimony on Senate Bill 290 to require all school buildings to install and maintain an exterior lockbox to better facilitate timely entry by law enforcement.

I am Tom Rhatican, Associate Director with the Catholic Conference of Ohio, which is the official voice of the Catholic Church and the 363 Catholic chartered nonpublic schools in Ohio.

The Catholic Conference of Ohio remains grateful for the state's assistance to all schools, public and nonpublic, to operate in accordance with best safety practices. We wish to ensure the lockboxes, which we hope will improve coordination and enable timely entry for law enforcement, are properly funded so they are not a burden on small Catholic schools seeking to update and fund new safety measures. The current Fiscal Note notes that the lockboxes may cost approximately $1,000 each, excluding installation fees.

The bill recommends that all schools, public and nonpublic, seek reimbursement from the Attorney General's Safety Grant program. However, as currently structured, safety grants are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, and the Fiscal Note warns that funds for the current biennium may already be expended.

"….the (Attorney General's Office)…provides these grants to public and chartered nonpublic schools, educational service centers, local law enforcement agencies, and schools operated by county boards of developmental disabilities for a variety of school safety and school climate programs and training. (And)…under the current grant guidelines districts and schools may apply for funding through a formula-based grant…until funds are exhausted. Funds are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. ***The AGO already anticipates full allocation of these funds from line item 055502 in FY 2026 and FY 2027 for its existing purposes."***

Thus, without any changes to how the bill plans to fund the exterior lockboxes, it appears likely that many schools will bear the cost of the new exterior lockboxes themselves. We ask that this type of required school safety equipment be funded by the state or ensure the Attorney General's safety program receives the necessary funding.

Again, the Catholic Conference of Ohio greatly appreciates Ohio's leadership in improving school safety measures.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Interested Party testimony on SB 290.