



Catholic Conference of Ohio

House Finance Committee (HB 33)

Larry Keough/Catholic Conference of Ohio

March 30, 2023

Good morning Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney 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 Operating Standards for students to 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, and Catholic schools are essential to the implementation of these programs. The majority of students on state-sponsored scholarships are enrolled in Catholic schools.

Catholic schools participate in these programs when parents independently exercise their educational choices.

Let's remember Catholic schools are not publicly-funded schools but serve a public purpose.

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 racial minorities. African American and Hispanic students represent approximately two-thirds of our racial 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.

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

Page 2/priority recommendations for Catholic Schools & Students

“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 proposal for family income to be extended to 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level in 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 schools 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.

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

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 recent years. 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.

Page 3/priority recommendations for Catholic Schools & Students

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.

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.

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.