

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

**Senate Finance Committee
Larry Keough/Catholic Conference of Ohio
May 31, 2023**

Good morning Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes 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 are not publicly-funded schools, but serve a public service.

We support the following recommendations to be included in the Senate version of the Budget;

SB 11 – the Parent Educational Freedom Act. Our understanding that a sliding scale/means testing provision is under consideration.

Our Request – Once families receive a set amount for a scholarship, do not decrease the scholarship when parents receive a pay raise. However, we understand that scholarships could be reduced for first-time scholarship recipients if family income is over a particular threshold.

Increase the categories of funding in the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program:

Categories of disabilities for the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program have been flatlined or received only modest increases over the past decade, but historically

maintained parity with the Autism Scholarship. Last General Assembly, the Autism Scholarship increased from \$27,000 to \$32,445 while the JPSNS program cap remained at \$27,000. We are seeking to restore parity with the Autism Scholarship program in category 6 as well as proportional increases in the other categories of special needs 1-5 by the same percentage.

The As Passed by the House version of the budget includes a 12% funding increase in categories 1-5 per the base cost increase and increases category 6 from \$27,000 to \$30,000 of which we are grateful. However, an additional increase in the Senate is needed to realign the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship with the Autism Scholarship Program at \$32,445 for the cap and a proportional increase for each category of special needs.

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 donations 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 an SGO, which awards scholarships with preference to low-income students.

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 proposals from the Executive Budget and the House version of the Budget' for a proposed 2.7 percent increase in FY 24 and 2.4 percent increase in FY 25 for Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Reimbursement.

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.

We ask for your support of a provision in HB 33 for district-owned vans to transport chartered nonpublic school students. This may reduce declarations of impracticality.

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.

And thirdly, the Department of Education is authorized to oversee a Compliance Monitoring System for school transportation. However, the scope of the compliance monitoring system does not include matters of impracticality.

We are seeking the code section for declarations of impracticality to be added within the Compliance Monitoring System.

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