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Date: March 2, 2026

Written OPPONENT testimony SB 491 Enacting the Haylee Weissenbach protecting students act to establish the office of education inspector general, authorize the education inspector general to conduct audits, investigations and reviews of educational institutions, require reporting of suspected professional and criminal misconduct by school employees and agents, require certain individuals to register on an educator misconduct registry, require criminal history record checks of school employees and agents and provide for civil penalties for violations of this act.

To: Madam Chair Senator Renee Erickson and Senate Education Committee members

From: Chuck Weber, Executive Director, Kansas Catholic Conference

Madam Chair Erickson and members of the committee,

My name is Chuck Weber, and I serve as the executive director of the Kansas Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic Bishops of Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to speak as an opponent to SB 491. While the objectives of SB 491 are laudable, there are many elements that necessitate our opposition.

The establishment of an Inspector General charged with broad oversight of schools, reporting requirements, audits and other obligations appears intrusive and overly burdensome, potentially infringing on the autonomy of our Catholic schools.

As a matter of policy and practice, Catholic schools in Kansas have developed and instituted what we believe to be the "Gold Standard" for safe environments for children. Among these policies are background checks for teachers and staff, training for employees on the detection and reporting of abuse and other instances of criminal misconduct to law enforcement, in addition to several other safeguards. Policies and procedures are always under review with an eye toward any revisions that help make them the very best possible.

No system or program is infallible. The Catholic Church and Catholic educators in Kansas have established and invested in an effective approach to safe environments for children. From our standpoint, while the goals of student safety are commendable, many elements of SB 491 are unhelpful and constitute government overreach.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Chuck Weber

Gerald C. "Chuck" Weber
Executive Director, Kansas Catholic Conference Chuck@KansasCatholic.org