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ORAL PROPONENT FOR SB 87/Web-X Testimony

Thank you, Madam Chair Estes, and members of the House Education Committee.
Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of SB 87, expanding the current low-income tax credit student scholarship program.

I cannot express enough what a true game changer this program has been for so many of our families and students. Our diocese, particularly our schools in far western Kansas, in Garden City and Dodge City, are a real reflection of the *"melting pot"* that has made Kansas and America such a wonderful and unique place to live. In our Catholic school system, we have students who speak over 10 different languages or dialects. You are all more than aware, the nature of this program, and our students on scholarships, all come from low-income families, what the State of Kansas describes as *"high-risk"* students.

Our Catholic community parents are deeply committed to ensuring the best possible education for their children. Sometimes this education is at the public schools *throughout western Kansas*. In fact, *most* Catholic families have their children in public schools. We have a stake in their vitality. Please, make no mistake, we know and support the fact that we need strong public schools. My husband is a public-school teacher and coach. He, his dedicated co-professionals, and the students in their care deserve fully funded schools.

But for *many* other families, the best fit, the place where their child thrives best, is at one of our (6) six Catholic schools. As you may be aware, our student population is a great and wonderful mix of various ethnicities; Guatemalan, El Salvadorean, Mexican, Karen, Burmese, Haitian, Laotian, Chinese and Chin, to name a few. 44% of our student population is Hispanic. The number of economically disadvantaged, or free and reduced students, in our diocesan schools are growing yearly; 36% as a district in the 2023-24 school year, with some schools in Garden and Dodge as high as 64% and 48% (economically disadvantaged) respectively.

Not to put too fine of a point on this, but many of the parents of our students work on the line at a beef processing plant. While there is dignity in all work, these parents are intensely committed to providing their children with additional opportunities for different career options. The parents' goal is to put their children in a position of choice versus circumstance. All families, regardless of economic background, should have the opportunity to choose a pathway for success for their child. With nearly 70% of our Catholic schools providing a proven quality education in their communities, spanning 85-140 years, we feel strongly about being a part of those choices.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We greatly appreciate your interest in helping provide the best opportunity for education available to every child. We firmly believe that this bill, and the expansion to the low-income tax credit student scholarship program, will ensure a brighter tomorrow for all Kansas children.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

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