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ORAL PROPONENT FOR HB 2468/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 HB 2468, the Low-Income Family Assistance Scholarship Act.

I cannot express enough what a true game changer the Low-Income Tax Credit Student Scholarship 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 6 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 continues to grow yearly; 42% as a district this school year, with some schools in Garden and Dodge as high

as 80% and 60% respectively. We are proud that our Catholic school families represent the communities we live in.

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 hopeful success for their child. With half of our Catholic schools providing a quality, proven, education in their communities for 100 years plus we feel strongly about being a part of those choices.

Opting in to the Federal Tax Credit program provides even more opportunities for Kansas students – those in my husband's public school and those attending my private schools. Our cities are very near the Colorado border, a state whose governor has been quoted as saying, "I would be crazy not to opt in. If Colorado doesn't participate, our federal tax dollars will simply flow to other states." We can absolutely say the same about federal tax dollars leaving Kansas and heading his way, or another surrounding state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We greatly appreciate your interest in helping provide education funding to families throughout our great state.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

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