

Written Testimony in Support of HB 2468, the Low-Income Family Assistance Scholarship Act

House Education Committee
Proponent Testimony HB 2468

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TITLE: Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Salina

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Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of the Low Income Family Assistance Scholarship Act. I previously testified in support of similar legislation, and while that effort did not advance last year, the need it sought to address has only grown more urgent for Kansas families.

My name is Geoff Andrews, and I serve as the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Salina. Our diocese spans approximately 26,000 square miles across north-central and northwest Kansas and serves communities that are predominantly rural. Our Catholic schools welcome families of all faiths and backgrounds and exist to serve students where they are—academically, socially, and personally. For many families in our region, educational choice is not about preference or ideology, but about finding the right fit for their child.

For more than a decade, Kansas has had a low-income tax credit scholarship program that provides meaningful assistance to families whose income falls at or below 250% of the federal poverty level, the same benchmark used for Affordable Care Act eligibility. Despite its proven success and careful oversight, the program's cap has remained unchanged, limiting its reach even as demand has steadily increased.

During the 2024–2025 school year alone, the Scholarship Granting Organization serving the Diocese of Salina awarded approximately \$138,000 in scholarships to 102 students—an average of \$1,351 per student. Since the 2021–2022 school year, our diocesan SGO has awarded more than \$500,000 in scholarships to low-income families seeking an educational environment where their children can succeed. For many of these families, the scholarship is not supplemental, it is essential.

The Low-Income Family Assistance Scholarship Act responsibly builds on this foundation by expanding eligibility and increasing the availability of tax credits tied to private donations. It is important to be clear: this program does not redirect public education dollars to private schools. Rather, it allows individuals and businesses to voluntarily contribute to state-approved scholarship organizations that operate under strict guidelines for eligibility, reporting, and accountability. As an educational leader, I strongly support fully funded public schools, while also recognizing that no single educational model works for every child.

A significant and timely component of this legislation is the opt-in alignment with the federal Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA). This provision positions Kansas to leverage a potential federal scholarship tax credit in a way that respects state authority and local decision-making. If families and donors choose to participate, the ECCA component

could meaningfully expand scholarship capacity without imposing new mandates or financial burdens on the state. For low-income families with limited options, this alignment represents a practical and forward-thinking approach to educational access.

At its core, this legislation affirms a simple principle: parents are the primary educators of their children, and income should not be a barrier to choosing the educational setting that best meets a child's needs. This is especially true in rural Kansas, where educational options may already be limited and where strong schools, public and private alike, serve as anchors for their communities.

I respectfully urge the committee to support the Low-Income Family Assistance Scholarship Act. This bill strengthens educational opportunity, encourages private investment, and helps ensure that Kansas students are not defined or limited by their family's financial circumstances.

I would also like to share a brief first-hand experience that illustrates the real impact of this program. Before serving in Catholic education, I spent many years as a public school teacher and administrator. In my final year as a public school administrator, a significant portion of my time was devoted to supporting one particular student. He struggled socially and behaviorally, was frequently teased by peers who knew how to push his buttons, and often found himself in conflict—fighting, acting out, and using inappropriate language toward students, teachers, and administrators. Despite the best efforts of caring educators, the environment was not the right fit for him.

The following year, this student and his siblings transferred to one of our Catholic schools. That transition was only possible because of support provided through the low-income tax credit scholarship program. Today, that same student is preparing to graduate this spring. He participates in athletics, sings at Mass, performs in school musicals, and is a member of the scholar's bowl team. He is not perfect—as none of us are—but he is growing into a confident, engaged, and respectful young man. I am incredibly proud of him and deeply grateful for the commitment and sacrifices his family has made to place their children in a school environment where they could thrive.

This is the kind of transformation that does not show up fully in spreadsheets or policy summaries, but it represents the heart of why this legislation matters. For some students, access to the right educational setting can be truly life-changing.

I would like to briefly address the federal opt-in provision related to the Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA). This portion of the legislation can be simple, practical, and focused squarely on Kansas students and families.

Opting in to ECCA would provide additional educational opportunities for Kansas students regardless of where they are enrolled, public, private, or religious schools alike. The ECCA scholarship framework is designed to help working families access educational options that meet their children's unique academic, social, and developmental needs. For families in rural Kansas, where choices may already be limited, this added flexibility matters.

Kansas would not be acting alone. Several of our neighboring states, including Missouri, Colorado, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, have already opted in or publicly expressed their intent to do so. If Kansas chooses not to participate, Kansas taxpayers will still contribute federal

dollars, but those resources are likely to flow to surrounding states instead of being reinvested in Kansas children. Simply put, opting in allows us to support our own students rather than exporting opportunity across state lines.

As Colorado Governor Jared Polis succinctly stated when discussing his state's decision to opt in, "I would be crazy not to opt in. If Colorado doesn't participate, our federal tax dollars will simply flow to other states." That same logic applies to Kansas. Opting in is a fiscally responsible decision that keeps resources focused on Kansas families while preserving local and state control.

For the Diocese of Salina, this alignment would complement the existing low-income scholarship framework already serving rural families. It strengthens our ability to support students like the one I described earlier, students whose success depends not on a single system, but on access to the right educational environment at the right time. The ECCA opt-in does not mandate participation; it simply ensures Kansas families and donors have the option to benefit.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your continued service to the children and families of Kansas.

Respectfully submitted,

Geoff Andrews
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Salina