

DATE: January 28, 2025

FROM: Dr. Jamie Finkeldei, Associate Superintendent, Catholic Diocese of Wichita

TO: Senator Renee Erickson and members of the Kansas Senate Education Committee

RE: Oral Testimony in Support of SB 75: Education Opportunity Tax Credit Program

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of SB 75, a measure to establish the Education Opportunity Tax Credit Program for Kansas.

My name is Jamie Finkeldei, and I serve as the Associate Superintendent for the schools in the Diocese of Wichita. Our diocese encompasses the southwestern quarter of Kansas and serves 8,839 students across 38 schools, making us the 9th largest school district in the state. Through our unique stewardship model, we are able to serve 2,376 students who qualify for free or reduced lunches under the federal Title I program, representing 27% of our student population.

We support this legislation because it provides parents with the opportunity to choose the educational environment that best meets their child's unique needs. All parents, regardless of their financial circumstances or background, deserve the ability to access the school that offers the best fit for their children.

Non-public schools have a proven track record of serving low-income families effectively. When we compare our state assessment data to that of public schools, we can safely say that our Catholic school at-risk students perform, on average, better than the high-risk students from public schools.

Don't get me wrong. Public schools are great and play an essential role in our communities, but non-public schools are great as well. Parents should have the freedom to choose schools based on factors such as location, class size, specialized programs, or services tailored to meet the needs of their exceptional children. This bill provides the means to ensure that educational choice is not a privilege but a right accessible to all.

This bill is also commendable because it extends educational opportunities beyond income-based limitations, ensuring that all families have access to a broader range of options. Furthermore, the implementation of a similar refundable tax credit program in Oklahoma has demonstrated its ability to benefit an even larger population of children, providing a potentially valuable precedent for Kansas to follow.

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for considering this important measure. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information as needed.

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