

**Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill No. 270 – Educational Tax Credits**

**by Bob Voboril**

**May 6, 2015**

My name is Bob Voboril, and for the past twenty-two years I have served as the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Wichita, which covers 25 counties of south-central and south-eastern Kansas. With 10,617 students, we are the ninth largest system of schools in Kansas and the second largest of the 70 school districts located within our boundaries.

I speak in support of the Senate Bill 270 and for the principle of educational tax credits.

1. Senate Bill 270 makes a technical correction in the original language of the educational scholarship tax credit law because of a unique situation in the Diocese of Wichita. Our schools already serve the most at-risk students of any non-public school system in Kansas. Currently our parishes fund the education of over 9,000 students without charging them tuition and we intend to continue this service. However, our parishes in the center city section of Wichita and our poorer rural areas simply have no funds left to fund more children. This proposed revision makes it possible for us to fund scholarships on behalf of more low income children. However, as the fiscal note for SB 270 demonstrates, the current cap of \$10 million in corporate tax credits would remain in place.
2. Although public schools have a monopoly on state funds, they do not have a monopoly on at risk students, ethnic minority students, students with special needs, or low-income students. Our school system has 2,500 students on free/reduced-price hot lunch, 3,000 ethnic minority students, 1,800 students on individual learning plans, and 1,000 students whose home language is not English. This bill recognizes and respects that reality.

3. We know that parents of low income students have limited educational choices because they cannot afford to live in higher achieving public school districts and they often cannot afford to pay the costs of attending non-public schools. I believe that it is always good public policy to help equalize opportunity for our low income citizens.
4. Non-public schools are particularly effective at serving the poor. Data compiled by the State of Kansas for the 2012-13 school year shows that for low-income students in Kansas, 92% of the students from the Diocese of Wichita met or exceeded state standards in reading while just 77% of the public school students did. The gap on the math assessment is equally wide: 86.7% for our students; 69.3% for public school students. This same gap holds true for all at-risk groups including Hispanic (92.3% vs. 74.0% in reading) and African-American students (79.5% vs. 68.4% in reading).
5. A tax credit is an excellent vehicle for addressing these challenges because it does not distribute any government money. Rather, it gives corporate taxpayers a credit for contributing their money to society's most important function: education.
6. Educational tax credits are spreading across the United States rapidly. Almost two dozen states have adopted some form of educational tax credit in the last ten years.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this important subject. If I can answer any questions I will be happy to do so.