

DATE: March 5, 2024

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

TO: Senator Caryn Tyson and members of the Senate Tax Committee

RE: **PROPONENT WRITTEN testimony for SB 509, Establishing the education opportunity tax credit to provide an income tax credit for taxpayers with eligible dependent children not enrolled in public school.**

Madam Chair Senator Tyson and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify as a PROPONENT for SB 509, a measure establishing the education opportunity tax credit program for Kansas.

My name is Jamie Finkeldei, and I serve as the Associate Superintendent for the Diocese of Wichita school district, which covers roughly the Southwest geographical quarter of Kansas. We have 8,840 students enrolled in grades K-12, including 2,320 students who qualify for free or reduced lunches under the federal government's Title 1 program.

We support this bill because it will provide parents with additional choices beyond public schools for their child's educational needs. We want to make sure that every parent, no matter their background, no matter their resources, has the ability to access the best school for them. Non-public schools are particularly effective at serving the poor. If you compare our Diocesan students who meet the criteria for free and reduced lunch to free and reduced lunch eligible students in the public schools, our students perform better. In English Language Arts, 88% of our low income students met or exceeded the state standards on the State assessment as compared to just 65% of public school students. The gap on the math assessment is equally wide: 85% for diocesan students; 62% for public school students. Non-public schools can make a difference in the lives of low income students, if we are given the opportunity to serve them.

But what makes this bill even better, is that it does not limit the expansion of educational opportunity by a family's income. Public schools are great, but so are private schools. Parents should have the ability to choose the school that best fits the need of their child. For some that is location, for others it is small class size, for others it is a special program, and for others services to meet their exceptional child's needs. Whatever their reason, parents should be able to choose the school that is right for them.

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee for allowing me to provide support for SB 509. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

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