Oral Testimony in Support of HB2136, expanding the low income tax credit scholarship program.

To: Madam Chair Rep. Estes and House Education Committee

From: Dr. Delia Shropshire, President - Holy Savor Catholic Academy

Date: February 5, 2025

Dear Madam Chair Rep. Estes and House Education Committee,

I am Dr. Delia Shropshire, President of Holy Savior Catholic Academy in the Diocese of Wichita. I am both humbled and honored to speak on behalf of HB2136 and what it has meant to our inner core Catholic school. First and foremost, the impact on families has been tremendous in that families who would not normally have the opportunity to enroll their children in a Catholic school now have that choice. We know that it is not about public vs. private, it is about our children being successful. We follow federal guidelines for accepting students. 80% of our students are from other faith traditions. We also know that every child develops, learns, and flourishes in different environments. With this opportunity, we can ensure that every child has the chance to learn, grow and develop in an academic environment that meets their needs academically, culturally, socially, emotionally and spiritually. Each year our enrollment has increased due to the low income tax credit scholarship program. By expanding the low income tax credit scholarship program, more families will be able to select a school that match their students' needs.

Accredited by KESA (Kansas Education Systems Accreditation), our students have a high school graduation rate of 98% (compared to the 77.8% national average for African American students, according to National Center for Education Statistics), 80% come from faith traditions aside from the Catholic faith, 78.6% African American or African, 14% Latino, 1% Caucasian, 0.4% Asian, 6% multi-ethnic, 33% live in a traditional home with both biological parents, and 86% qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. Of our graduating classes over the last several years, students went on to Kapaun Mt Carmel, Northeast Magnet, and East IB. We use a 1.3 years' growth model to ensure every student progresses 1 year and 3 months each year from their baseline data. We support our students at the high school level with mentoring and tutoring to ensure their success.

In the Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACES) it has been identified that children who live in poverty experience more stress and trauma than children who do not. Childhood trauma and stress adversely impact the brain and the brain cannot recover until certain social emotional conditions are met according to brain scans and medical studies. Children in at-risk, in trauma and/or under stress (not will not, or refuse to learn) but cannot learn until they are in an environment where they feel accepted. School choice is necessary for families to match a learning environment with their child's need so they can learn and be successful.

Every child that becomes a successful contributing member of society saves the state millions of dollars. We have a student who has entered our school through this wonderful opportunity of School Choice in Kindergarten from a low income family. He is an African American male who has academic and social – emotional challenges. The stressors of the family were not only difficult for him but also he did not have the tools to positively express himself. Initially it appeared to be a behavior or deficiency issue. However, in our classroom with a 12:1 ratio and with many adults positively rallying around him, especially our School Resource Teacher who we have been able to add to our team due to tax credit funding, he now receives the support and help he needs. The family also receives support from our Social Worker. This student is now in the 6th grade and recently his biological noncustodial father died while incarcerated. Imagine the trajectory this student may have been on without the tax credit scholarship. In spite of his loss, he is in school every day, thriving because of the relationships, support systems, and his love of education.