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Testimony in Favor of House Bill No. 2767 – Educational Tax Credits

by Bob Voboril

March 6, 2012

My name is Bob Voboril, and for the past nineteen 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 10,671 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 House Bill 2767 and for the principle of educational tax credits. While this bill needs refinement, the principles for which it stands are essential if the educational system of Kansas is going to produce highly qualified workers in sufficient numbers to fuel this state's economy and to attract workers and employers from other states and nations.

My support is based on the following principles:

1. Every child needs and deserves a quality education that prepares them to be good citizens, family members, and workers. I believe Kansas wants this.
2. Parents have the first responsibility to provide for the education of their children. Parents are the first and best teachers of their children. I believe Kansans support this.
3. Parents must have the right to choose the best school for their children without being penalized for enrolling them in a school not operated by the government. In Kansas, this is not true.
4. The State of Kansas has a vested interest in the education of every child, with a special obligation to the children in the public schools it sponsors. The State rightly spends more money on public education than on any other budget item.

5. However, that does not excuse the State from its obligation to the 60,000 or more children who do not attend public schools. This bill agrees.
6. 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. This bill understands that reality.
7. Dollars and programs should follow children, not the type of school they attend. Tax dollars already follow children to religious day care centers, religious pre-schools, religious colleges, religious hospitals, religious charitable organizations, and religious nursing homes following a principle that assistance is given to those who need it most, not according to whether the institution is owned by the government. This bill recognizes that principle.
8. A tax credit is an excellent vehicle for addressing these challenges because it does not distribute the state's money. Rather, it gives taxpayers a credit for contributing their money to society's most important function: education.
9. Educational tax credits are spreading across the United States rapidly. Two states in the last year and at least a dozen in the last ten years have adopted some form of educational tax credit.
10. Educational tax credits would bring the United States into line with the other western nations who have long taken the position that government has an obligation to all children. It moves us away from countries like Mexico and Cuba which also punish families for sending their children to schools that are not government-owned.

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