

Senate Committee on Education

SB 63 Proponent Testimony

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Madame Chair and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Chuck Weber and I serve as executive director of the Kansas Catholic Conference. I represent the Catholic Bishops of Kansas in this capacity. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 63 on behalf of thousands of families enrolled in our Catholic schools across Kansas. The American College Test standardized academic assessment is, for most of our Kansas high school students, a necessary step to higher education. This test is not only required by many colleges and universities for admission, but often is a factor in determining scholarships and other advantages available to our children as they look to secure a future through education.

What many do not realize is that the significant fee required to take the ACT is, for many of our families, a serious obstacle to their children's opportunities. Students are advised to take this test several times to reach their optimal score. It is normal for students to use a first test to get a "base line" score and determine which areas need increased focus for study.

The Catholic Diocese of Wichita School Office tells us that 25% of all their students are free or reduced-lunch eligible. The Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas reports that they operate 42 schools in 21 counties throughout Northeast Kansas. 37% of their student body comes from households eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Faced with the high cost of this test, most families must limit their child's participation and this lead, in many respects, to an uneven playing field because they are often competing with students in schools where the test is paid for and students can return as often as they wish to improve their scores.

Many parents with children enrolled in our Catholic schools work several jobs so their child can benefit from a faith-based education that they feel is the best fit for their student. We have high numbers of student who qualify for free and reduced lunch and all our schools work ceaselessly to make Catholic education affordable to every student. In spite of this, our children struggle to pay for the ACT and this bill will be a true blessing for them.

We thank each of you for your vote in favor of our students and their families as they look to their futures.