

Advocacy Directions for Supporters of Opportunity Scholarships

The Nebraska Catholic Conference strongly supports the Opportunity Scholarship Act (LB 295), which had a hearing in January and now awaits a vote in the Revenue Committee. The Act would create a tax credit to incentivize donations to “Scholarship Granting Organizations”, which turn nearly all their revenue into private-school scholarships for low- and middle-income families. The political winds in Nebraska are finally at our back. But we need your help to get the bill across the finish line.

For Parents, Students, and Supporters:

Share your story:

If you have a personal story about a positive experience with Catholic schools, you can have a powerful impact by sharing it with others. Maybe you wanted a faith-based environment. Maybe Catholic school was just a better “fit” for you and your family. Maybe you or your child have benefited from a private scholarship and you want others to have the same opportunity.

You can share your story with your own senator, senators on the Revenue Committee, local newspapers, social media, and the Nebraska Catholic Conference, as provided below.

Call, email, or write your senator:

Contact your senator to personally convey why Catholic school was best for you and your family, or to simply encourage your senator to support Opportunity Scholarships (LB 295). You can find senators’ contact information at http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_list.php. The Revenue Committee roster is available here: <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/committees/roster.pdf>.

Meet with your senator:

Senators appreciate hearing from you more than from lobbyists, especially about how Opportunity Scholarships will have a personal impact for the better. Call your senator’s office and set up a meeting, or talk to them in the Capitol Rotunda during floor debates. Contact the Nebraska Catholic Conference for more information.

Write a letter-to-the-editor:

Writing a letter-to-the-editor can be a powerful, easy way of demonstrating public support. The NCC can help share it with others on social media and on our website. Here are some talking points to consider, beyond your personal story:

- Different children have different needs.
- Opportunity scholarships are funded purely by private donations, not public funds.
- Opportunity scholarships break down financial barriers that prohibit parental choice in education.
- Successful private schools promote successful public schools, and vice versa.
- Opportunity scholarships go to families that cannot otherwise afford private school.
- Nebraska’s private schools save \$450 million in public funds every year.
- Opportunity scholarships exist in 17 states – including Kansas, Iowa, and South Dakota.
- They have saved more than \$280 million in Iowa alone.

For Schools:

Student letters:

Students of all ages can write short letters to their senators – and to senators on the Revenue Committee – explaining why they love their Catholic school.

A sample letter for young students is as follows:

“I love my Catholic school because _____. Please support Opportunity Scholarships (LB 295) and help more kids like me.”

For older students, relating their personal experience and explaining the policy benefits would be appropriate. Feel free to use the talking points above and/or contact the Nebraska Catholic Conference for more information.

Student projects:

Young students can illustrate a day in the life of their Catholic school and mail their picture to senators, or personally drop them off at their offices on a field trip (e.g., senators on the Revenue Committee, and/or the senator who represents the school’s legislative district).

Teacher and administrator outreach:

Teachers and administrators can reach out to their senators, and/or write public letters, explaining the quality of education in Catholic schools, the diverse demographics of the student body, and the need for more financial assistance to low- and middle-income families.

Teachers and administrators bring an important, informed perspective to bear regarding the effectiveness and mission-oriented environment of Catholic schools – which help student after student to flourish.

Parent and stakeholder education sessions:

Host a session for parents and stakeholders to learn more about “school choice” laws in general and Opportunity Scholarships in particular. The Church clearly teaches that government must pass laws that further a parent’s right to choose the education best suited for their child – including Catholic education.

Many states have passed laws that further this right, but Nebraska lags far behind. The Nebraska Catholic Conference is happy to provide more information and/or to speak at such a session.

Final note:

- **Stay positive:** Personal stories and compelling information about Catholic schools will go a long way in winning the culture. Our message to lawmakers is not that Catholic schools are *against*, but rather *partners with*, public schools.
- **Show uniqueness:** Nonetheless, Catholic schools can provide students with a faith-based education, something the U.S. Supreme Court has unfortunately outlawed from public schools.
- **Engage others:** Talk to friends and family about the importance of school choice, and the opportunity in Nebraska to help more low- and middle-income students attend Catholic schools.

For more information, visit www.necatholic.org.