



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida

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Testimony regarding House Education Appropriations Subcommittee Bill 3 (EDAS3) and the Expansion of Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program

Provided during House Education Appropriations Subcommittee Meeting
by James B. Herzog, Associate Director for Education
March 28, 2014

Thank you Mister Chair and committee members. My name again is James Herzog and I serve as Associate Director for Education at the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Conference represents 84,000-plus school children – from prekindergarten to 12th grade – in 235 schools. This makes us one of the largest systems of nonpublic schools in Florida. The Conference advocates for parental empowerment in education to help their children reach their full academic potential.

The Conference also advocates for a strong system of public education. In fact, there are an estimated 300,000 Catholic students who attend public schools in Florida. I know because I was one of them (for high school).

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program allows us to serve nearly 9,500 students from low-income families. These students represent 11 percent of our total enrollment.

It has been pointed out that Florida does not require private school teachers to be certified. While that is true, Catholic schools in Florida employ hundreds and hundreds of certified classroom teachers. Parents can and often do look up the certification status of teachers via special Florida Department of Education websites.

It has also been pointed out that academic results of scholarship schools should be carefully analyzed. However, a quick review of existing data is quite revealing. In particular, a 2010 report by the National Catholic Educational Association shows that Catholic high schools have a 99 percent graduation rate and more than 84 percent of Catholic high school students go on to a four-year college or university.

Going forward, the Conference anticipates participating in meetings with legislators to explain the many ways scholarship schools are already held accountable.

This bill empowers parents of children in 6th to 12th grade to have the same type of school choice as that experienced by parents of children in Kindergarten to 5th grade.