

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

201 WEST PARK AVENUE
TALLAHASSEE, FL 32301-7715

PHONE (850) 205-6820
FAX (850) 205-6849
WWW.FLACCB.ORG

MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



April 25, 2014

The Honorable Bill Galvano
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Re: **Feedback for tax credit scholarship provisions under SB 1512**

Dear Senator Galvano:

I write to provide feedback regarding the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program provisions of SB 1512. We have reviewed the new language and offer the following points.

Supporting Key Changes in Bill

Regarding the expansion elements, the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops (FCCB) was pleased to see the provision for the removal of the prior-public attendance requirement for eligibility. We were also grateful to see the provision for the broader definition of foster children. In addition, we appreciated the language to allow the basic scholarship amount to grow to 82 percent of the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) by the 2016-2017 state fiscal year.

Further Recommendations – Addressing Two Remaining Concerns

1. Retaining “learning gains” along with new “student performance” language

We recommend retaining the term "learning gains" in statute where it is replaced with “student performance.” Reports by independent researcher David Figlio in recent years have shown that the Program serves the lowest-performing students who have left public schools. We are concerned that their “performance” data alone could be taken out of context. Measuring both gains and achievement will give a fuller picture of both student learning and program efficacy.

2. State assessment accommodations

The requirement for private schools to make arrangements with school districts for students who wish to take state assessments is a concern. It could be problematic as the 67 districts may have different interpretations for administering assessments to nonpublic school students. Nonpublic schools have had trouble arranging end-of-course assessments which were previously required for students who intended to transfer into public schools. Some districts did not make those assessments readily available to such students. Last year’s CAPE Act (SB 1076) helped to resolve most of those issues. Given experience with similar policies, we would prefer to retain the current law regarding parents who opt for state assessments for their children. This would avoid placing a new burden that could leave nonpublic schools scrambling to coordinate with district assessment schedules and availability.

Thank you for all your work on this important proposal to empower parents and schoolchildren.

Respectfully yours,

James B. Herzog
Associate Director of Education

Cc: The Honorable Kelli Stargel; and, Dr. Frank Fuller, Senior Policy Advisor on Education