



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

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**Prepared Remarks for House Pre-K-12 Innovation Subcommittee Panel on PCS for HB  
829 regarding McKay Scholarship Program Access  
James Herzog, Associate Director for Education  
January 23, 2018**

Thank you Mister Chair and Committee Members and Good Morning:

My name again is James Herzog and I serve as Associate Director for Education at the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Conference represents 146 schools participating in the McKay Scholarship Program to serve more than 3,500 students with special needs.

We greatly appreciate the efforts of Representatives Plasencia and Ponder as sponsors for the original House Bill 829 to empower parents seeking access to the invaluable McKay Scholarship Program. We also support the Amendment (10000 for the Proposed Committee Substitute) to HB 829. Even though it is not as robust as the original bill, it is still a helpful step in the right direction.

This amendment will empower parents by allowing them to find the best educational settings to match the unique academic needs of their schoolchildren. The so-called "prior-public-school-attendance requirement" would be reduced to a semester or less. This would also help parents who move to Florida from other states.

As the bill continues to move through the process, we would respectfully ask a question which is this:

- What about parents of children already attending nonpublic schools?

In other words, please give further consideration to the prior-public-attendance requirement. There are parents whose children currently attend nonpublic schools but did not realize until kindergarten or later that their children may have special needs such as high-functioning autism or dyslexia. Such children may have classmates who receive McKay. However, these children would have to leave the nonpublic school and attend public school for a number of months to gain eligibility. Thank you for the chance to speak today; I am happy to take any questions, Mister Chair.