



April 8, 2025

S.F. 2255 – Minnesota Catholic Conference – Opposition to Cuts to Nonpublic Pupil Aid

Chair Kunesh and Members of the Senate Education Finance Committee:

We write to express our strong opposition to the elimination of nonpublic pupil education aid and nonpublic pupil transportation aid in the Senate Delete-All Amendment (A-3) to S.F. 2255, (see lines 22.1-22.4), which are proposed to take effect on July 1 of this year. This proposal defunds students based solely on their school choice and backs away from a bi-partisan, decades-long commitment to fund essential services for all students. Funding for these aids is allocated directly to and administered by school districts for the benefit of nonpublic students. Please take the elimination of these important student aids out of S.F. 2255.

Nonpublic pupil aid supports important student needs such as testing, textbooks, counseling, and nursing. The nonpublic transportation aid (which includes busing) is an essential service that makes it possible for many kids to attend a school that best serves their needs.

As stated in Minn. Stat. § 123B.40, which this legislation repeals: *It is the intent of the legislature to provide for distribution of educational aids such as textbooks, standardized tests and pupil support services so that every school pupil in the state will share equitably in education benefits and therefore further assure all Minnesota pupils and their parents freedom of choice in education.*

This expenditure is less than one half of one percent of the entire education budget, but is a vital support for nonpublic school students, many of who come from low-income backgrounds. Tricia Menzhuber, Principal at St. John Paul II Catholic School said at a February 11 legislative hearing, “At JP II we serve 208 scholars kindergarten through 8th grade, with another 20 children in our early childhood learning center; 88 percent are students of color, and 76 percent meet the federal threshold for free and reduced lunches. We admit all students who apply. The majority of our families live on the margins of society.”

This proposal is short-sighted from a fiscal standpoint. Nonpublic schools save the state alone (not including local units of government) approximately \$500 million dollars per year. If more students are priced out of nonpublic schools because schools have to raise tuition and have to attend public schools, both the state and public school districts will face increased budget pressures.

Our school families, who also pay taxes for the public system, deserve better. Trying to make up for over \$1000 in lost funding per student cannot be done overnight. And the last thing that we should be cutting are programs that provide direct aid to families, whether through tax credits,

housing or healthcare assistance, or student education supports. Family economic security should be our number one priority.

Speaking about this proposed elimination at a February 11 legislative hearing, Quentin Moore, Vice President of Advancement at Ascension Catholic Academy, where 72% of scholars qualify for free or reduced lunch under federal guidelines, stated: “[This proposal] doesn’t make sense fiscally, it doesn’t make sense for our scholars and our families that we serve, and it will have tremendous detrimental impact to nonpublic scholars and families.”

We recognize that long-term budget numbers are cloudy, but there is still a surplus in this biennium. We encourage you to prioritize direct assistance to families over other budgetary items that, while not unimportant, should be considered amenities instead of priorities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

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