



Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Chancery Office

Good afternoon Madam Chairwoman and committee members. It is a pleasure and an honor to be able to address this Committee today on an issue as important as school choice. In a state as culturally, economically, and geographically diverse as the state of Texas, there are a myriad of important issues demanding our attention everyday. However, there is no more important natural resource in the entire state of Texas than our children, all of our children, and the future of our state is dependent on their educational development.

The formation and education of children is a responsibility that begins with and primarily rests with parents. Parental involvement with their children's education is a fundamental matter of critical importance that is too often undervalued by some in our society. Because of this importance, it is the proper role of government to respect the autonomy of parents and not duly interfere with their unique responsibility. In addition to the importance of parents and their concerns, society also has an interest in the education and the well being of children. It is in the best interests of all of us that future generations of children receive a good education that prepares them to be contributing members of society.

For these reasons it is important that all students receive the best education possible whether they attend a public school, a charter school, a private or parochial school, or are home schooled. In this regard, Texans are at least fortunate that we are a national leader in terms of educational options that parents may select from in determining the best interests of their children.

Nonetheless, although parents may have educational options from which to choose, these choices are meaningless if children are unable to attend particular schools because of financial or other concerns.

We also have great concern for the entire K-12 public school systems in our state. The vast majority of Texas' children attend public school systems. It is in our best interests that these schools are provided with the resources and support that are needed for them to succeed.

Private and parochial schools also play a very important role in educating Texas' children that in no way should be seen as a threat to the public school systems. Historically, many of these schools, especially Catholic schools, have been located in underserved inner city neighborhoods and remote rural areas where public schools did not even exist. According to the latest information provided by the National Catholic Education Association, approximately fourteen percent of all students attending Catholic schools in the United States are not Catholic.

In Texas that would be a more than 11,000 students, the overwhelming majority of whom live in low-income and crowded inner-cities, such as here in Houston

Catholic schools, as part of their mission, make a concerted effort to serve these disadvantaged students and provide them with a quality education that is desired by their parents. However, despite the success of Catholic schools there are still a large number of families who are unable to afford the tuition costs necessary to send their children to the schools that best suit their needs. Because of this large demand, the Bishops of Texas support the school choice initiative. A fair and just public policy would assist these families to access educational choice for their children.

In conclusion, Texas' future depends on our children and the commitment that we make toward their education and development. Regardless of where parents decide to educate their children, we must ensure that parents have the support they need so that their children can receive a quality education.

Our children, all our children, whether in public schools or parochial schools, are the most valuable natural resource we have and must always be cherished. It is our fervent hope that the public policy decisions made in our state are also reflective of this fact so that Texas will fulfill its unlimited potential represented in all of our children. Thank you very much.

Most Reverend Daniel N. Dinardo
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