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**Testimony of Archbishop José H. Gomez, S.T.D., Archbishop of San Antonio
Public Hearing of the Texas Senate Education Committee
80th Texas Legislature
March 29, 2007**

I thank you for this opportunity to present our concerns over education in the State of Texas. Quality education is necessary for a person to live a productive and responsible life, and to build a just society that respects the dignity of every human person.

I come to you to encourage you to support the parents of Texas whose right and obligation is to provide the opportunity for a quality education for their children. I believe, as the Council Fathers of Vatican II said in their document on Christian education that parents “Must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools”; and that they must be “Truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children.”

This legislative session has been given a unique opportunity to affirm, that regardless of economic status, faith tradition, or ethnic background, that parents should have the authority to choose the best opportunity for a quality education for their children. Sadly, for families of limited economic means, the current system takes away that right and provides no opportunity for choice. It is my hope that you will support equal access to a quality education for all our children.

Our advocacy for School Choice is in no way intended to be a negative reflection on our Texas public school system or its teachers or administrators. It is our position that giving parents the opportunity to choose, unencumbered by economic considerations, that all educational institutions will benefit, public and private, without reducing current funding for public schools.

I believe that the competition that will logically grow from the opportunities school choice provides will actually strengthen public schools by improved student performance, reduced costs, and increased revenues from reduced dropout rates.

As economic and social challenges confront us in years to come, I hope that you be bold in your actions to insure that every child is prepared for the future, with access to the widest variety of quality educational options available to him or her. As you seize this opportunity to level the education playing field for all, you will build a bright future for all Texans, in the best democratic tradition.

I come to you, compelled to share our moral convictions on this important issue. I look forward to creating a new partnership with all those who are dedicated to providing quality education for every child. I thank you for your serious consideration of this opportunity to make education choice a reality for all families of Texas.