

Testimony of John L. Cattalan
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Raised Bill 5594, An Act Concerning a Corporate Tax Credit and An Income Tax
Credit For Donations to Education Foundations
Education Committee
February 29, 2008

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the education committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is John Cattalan and I am the Director of the Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents, which represents the 140 Catholic schools in Connecticut and the almost 36,000 students that attend those schools.

I am here today to speak in favor of H.B. 5594, An Act Concerning a Corporate Tax Credit and An Income Tax Credit For Donations to Education Foundations, specifically section 1 (e) (3), which would allow for scholarships for lower-income children to attend a private or religious school. I would also like to note the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools, the Connecticut Association Christian Schools and the Western New England Jewish Day School Forum support this proposal as well.

While we believe there are many quality public schools in Connecticut with dedicated staff and successful students, we believe this legislation will allow

more lower-income families to attend a private or religious school they otherwise wouldn't be able to attend.

All three dioceses in Connecticut provide financial assistance to families who meet certain income requirements, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. However, we have limited resources and are not able to help every student who wants to attend one of our schools.

The minority enrollment in our Catholic schools in Connecticut is almost 6,000 students or 15% of our total student population. Those numbers are even higher in our inner cities and suburban schools. For example, St. Brigid School in West Hartford has a minority enrollment of 54%, while our inner city Catholic schools have a minority enrollment of 50% to 99%, including St. Augustine's school in Hartford which has a minority enrollment of 99%. We believe this legislation would allow more minority children, especially from the inner cities, to attend a private or religious school.

Connecticut's Catholic schools save the taxpayers of our state over \$400 million a year. All of our schools are accredited by the New England Association of Schools and College. The average SAT score of students

attending Catholic high schools is above both the state of Connecticut and national average in all three tested areas. Our students in grades 3 through 7 take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills every year and the average scores for students in Connecticut's Catholic schools were above grade level in all tested areas. Our schools have a student teacher ratio of 12 to 1. Finally our Catholic High Schools in the state have a graduation rate of 99% and those same 99% go on to pursue college or the military.

Currently four states, Arizona, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, have a tax credit program for Corporations that donate to scholarship programs for lower and middle income families. Arizona and Rhode Island just enacted these programs in 2006.

In states with these programs, spending on public education has actually increased as a whole, contrary to the belief it would take funds away from public schools.

In conclusion, we believe that Government at all levels, acting in partnership with parents, has a responsibility to provide resources to assist all children attain a quality education. Thank you.