

CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Connecticut General Assembly concluded its work last month, and we would like to share with you our profound disappointment that House Bill 5340 *An Act Concerning Education Savings Accounts* was not permitted to see the light of day, even though it had the support of a number of legislators and had advanced through various committees.

For years, the Connecticut Catholic Conference (CCC) has tried to impress upon the state legislature both the justice and the benefit of providing significant relief to Catholic school families. Catholic parents, like all residents, contribute to state and local revenue. And by reducing the number of students in public schools, our families and parishes have underwritten public education for decades.

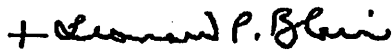
Yet, despite twelve million dollars in tuition aid from parishioners and the three (Arch) dioceses in Connecticut last year, many working families cannot afford to enroll their children in our schools. To help them, the CCC has proposed an expanded inter-district transportation system and corporate tax-credits to K-12 scholarship foundations. And yet, unlike other states that provide some sort of assistance to private school families, these proposals have been virtually *dead on arrival* at the Connecticut legislature. Only on a very limited basis has some legislation advanced.

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) would grant parents access to funds equivalent to all or a portion of the money allocated toward their child's government school education, to use on educational alternatives such as tutoring, learning therapies, and private school tuition. It would enable our superintendents to expand special needs services that have been cost prohibitive at some of our schools. This expansion of services would make Catholic education greatly accessible to an even more diverse student population—a population that already ethnically and racially mirrors the Connecticut census.

Sadly, Catholic schools in Connecticut have been closing. In 1967 there were 205 Catholic elementary schools in Connecticut. Five decades later, in 2017, there were 78 schools. There are some people who are happy at this trend. We are not, but this diminishment will continue without some reasonable steps from the legislature comparable to what has worked in several other states.

We invite you, the Catholic people of our State, to make known to your elected representatives the importance and the justice of legislative measures that can ease the burden of education for Catholic school parents who are exercising their right as the primary educators of their children. As legal scholar of religious liberty Carl Esbeck wrote, when the state offers educational services to its resident children, it should not exclude a child whose parent makes a religious choice over a secular one: "To take note of religion only in order to exclude it from modern civil society...runs counter to the Establishment Clause's predisposition to enlarge religious freedom."

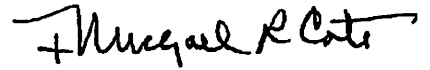
Thank you for your attention and support, and above all for your efforts on behalf of our Catholic schools. God bless you.



Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford



Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport



Most Reverend Michael R. Cote
Bishop of Norwich