

TO: Assembly Committee on Government Accountability and Oversight

FROM: Dr. Kathleen Cepelka, Superintendent of Catholic Schools

DATE: June 7, 2017

RE: Assembly Bill 304 & Assembly Bill 300, Mandatory Pupil Examination Opt Out

On behalf of Catholic schools and the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 304. By providing parents and guardians with the opportunity to direct how their children are assessed, AB 304 affirms the essential Catholic teaching that a parent is the primary educator of their child.

I welcome the changes under AB 304, which extend a parent's ability to excuse his or her student from taking certain required examinations. As current school accountability measures track student progress in grades three through twelve, it makes sense that any parental option to forgo the administration of pupil examinations apply in all these grades. As currently only the cost of testing choice students is covered by the state, private schools do not always test all students due to high per-pupil cost for administering the state examination to non-choice students. Therefore, parents may wish to forgo testing so as to avoid their student being identified as a choice student when the state assessment is administered at the school.

Overall, Assembly Bill 304 allows for greater parental engagement and ensures fairness within the school accountability system. By recognizing the distinctive ways in which Catholic schools and families operate, we can develop consistent and fair practices that still maintain sufficient measures of performance. This will ensure a transparent system that maintains accountability without altering the unique character and climate of our Catholic schools.

I would also like to take this opportunity to comment on the notice requirements under Assembly Bill 300. Assembly Bill 300 requires that schools, including choice program schools, provide an annual assessment summary notice to student families on or before an examination covered by the summary is administered. Among other things, the summary must list the tests used, the grades tested, anticipated testing dates, the duration of the exams, the purpose of the examinations, how test data will be used, and information on how a family may opt to have a student excused from test administration. As only private school students participating in a parental choice program are required to take state assessments, it is appropriate that the disclosure requirements are limited to these families. Like the amendment provided to similar legislation during the 2015 Legislative session, I appreciate that AB 300 also recognizes this distinction.

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