



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator John Jagler, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Education

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director for Education and Religious Liberty

DATE: March 3, 2026

RE: Support for SB 452 / AB 460, Pupil Eligibility for Parental Choice Programs
Based Upon Sibling Participation

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in support of SB 452.

Under this bill, a student is eligible to participate in one of the three parental choice programs if the student's sibling (or a dependent child of the parents) participated in the program the previous school year. The parental choice programs already have a so-called "once in, always in" provision meaning that students keep the voucher even if family income rises above the threshold, so long as the student does not voluntarily leave the program. This bill extends this provision to siblings or other children in the family.

The Catholic Church's teaching on education emphasizes that parents are the first and primary educators of their children.¹ Nevertheless, they need the cooperation of civil and church authorities to exercise this right:

Parents are the first educators, not the only educators, of their children. It belongs to them, therefore, to exercise with responsibility their educational activity in close and vigilant cooperation with civil and ecclesial agencies. . . . Parents have the right to choose the formative tools that respond to their convictions and to seek those means that will help them best to fulfil their duty as educators, in the spiritual and religious sphere also. Public authorities have the duty to guarantee this right and to ensure the concrete conditions necessary for it to be exercised.²

From this right and responsibility to oversee the education of their children, parents must be able to freely choose the schools that best fit the needs of their children. For this reason, the Catholic Church supports both public and private education. What the Church opposes is the government's denial of funds for private education that serves the public good:

¹ [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), 2223.

² [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), 240.

The refusal to provide public economic support to non-public schools that need assistance and that render a service to civil society is to be considered an injustice. ‘Whenever the State lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice ... The State cannot without injustice merely tolerate so-called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance.’³

Regardless of the school, parents have a responsibility to educate their children, and the state has a responsibility to support and create an educational environment that provides real choices for high-quality education. The state must not “merely tolerate” private schools. Wisconsin must continue to invest in all areas of education: public, private, independent charters, and home schools.

Public and private education should not be pitted against each other. Simply put, all investments in high-quality education improve the community. Making every school better serves Wisconsin, our students, and our families. The education of students is what matters.

Wisconsin was the first state to affirm parental choice, and the movement has been a great success across the country. This bill furthers the empowerment of parents and the academic achievements of their children. It helps keep siblings together and lessens the fiscal and transportation burdens on parents. It helps give parents real choice and is a vital step in helping Wisconsin families thrive.

For all these reasons, we strongly urge you to support SB 452. Thank you.

³ [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), 241