

Catholic Conference of Ohio

Press Release

For Immediate release
July 29, 2009

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Catholic Bishops of Ohio voice dismay over state budget cuts in human services, Catholic hospitals and Catholic schools

The Most Reverend Daniel E. Pilarczyk, Archbishop of Cincinnati, speaking on behalf of Ohio's Catholic Bishops, issued a letter voicing dismay with specific cuts in the state budget, and disappointment with a political process that disregarded the concerns of many members of the General Assembly.

In a letter sent to Governor Strickland and each member of the Ohio General Assembly on July 27, the bishops expressed strong concern over cuts impacting the elderly, mentally ill, Catholic hospitals, and students in Catholic schools. In a prior letter ([March 24, 2009](#)) sent to elected state officials, the bishops specifically addressed the negative impact of budget cuts on Ohio's hospitals and nursing homes.

According to Carolyn Jurkowitz, executive director of the Catholic Conference, the bishops gave extra attention in their more recent letter to cuts totaling \$59M in services to Catholic school students and administrative cost reimbursement to Catholic schools. "We have the largest number of chartered nonpublic schools in Ohio, and therefore a major responsibility to promote fair and equitable treatment of all students, no matter where they attend school," Jurkowitz explained.

The bishops wrote: "For over 25 years, state budgets treated students attending public and chartered nonpublic schools equitably. As state funding for public schools increased or decreased, line items benefiting students in chartered nonpublic schools increased or decreased proportionately. In HB1, this did not happen. The final budget reduced line items supporting students in chartered nonpublic schools by 15 percent from the House and Senate-passed versions of the budget bill... while state support for students in public schools [was] reduced by less than one percent and then bolstered with federal stimulus money. The new budget suggests that Catholic taxpayers and the children we serve will be the last to receive any consideration and the first to be cut."

Catholic Conference of Ohio

Catholic Conference of Ohio Press Release
July 29, 2009
Page 2

The bishops point out the high-quality education that Catholic schools provide to hundreds of thousands of citizens, and the tremendous contribution Catholic schools make to Ohio: “Catholic and other chartered nonpublic schools save the taxpayers of Ohio \$2 billion a year in educational cost that the state would pay if these students were attending public schools. Our schools have a long history of public accountability for the public dollars and services they receive.”

The bishops also lamented the lack of opportunity to defend school funding during the conference committee process. Once the conference committee recommendations were made public, they were voted upon the same day, without the opportunity for amendments. The bishops note: “Many legislators told us that they disagreed with the cuts made in benefits for students in Catholic schools, and with the lack of opportunity to voice their concerns or influence the conference committee process.”

The text of the bishops’ letter follows:

Dear elected official,

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Ohio, I write to register several concerns regarding the state budget (HB1). We recognize the unprecedented economic situation facing Ohio, but we are troubled by the selectivity and harshness of certain cuts and the lack of public input into the conference committee’s recommendations.

Some positive changes occurred before the budget finally was approved; however, deep cuts still were made to programs in mental health, elder care and protective services. Catholic hospitals will experience a serious shortfall. We are very disappointed in the cut of \$59 million over the next two years to line items 200-511 and 200-532 that provide assistance to students attending Catholic and other chartered nonpublic schools. Furthermore, reduction in the scholarship amounts for EdChoice and elimination of systematic increases in these amounts will be detrimental to parents and students who desire to benefit from an education in our Catholic schools.

For over 25 years, state budgets treated students attending public and chartered nonpublic schools equitably. As state funding for public schools increased or decreased, line items benefiting students in chartered nonpublic schools increased or decreased proportionately. In HB1, this did not happen. The final budget reduced line items supporting students in chartered nonpublic schools by 15 percent from the House and Senate-passed versions of the budget bill. When the new cuts are added to cuts made during 2008/2009, funding for these programs benefiting students in chartered nonpublic schools will be 17.5 percent less than it was on July 1, 2008, while state support for students in public schools will be reduced by less than one percent and then bolstered with federal stimulus money. The new budget suggests that Catholic taxpayers and the children we serve will be the last to receive any consideration and the first to be cut.

Catholic Conference of Ohio

Catholic Conference of Ohio Press Release

July 29, 2009

Page 3

The \$59 M cut in the *Auxiliary Services* and *Administrative Cost Reimbursement* programs undermines the education of thousands of Ohio's young people and threatens to destabilize a system of schools that provides a high-quality education for hundreds of thousands of citizens of this state. As a result of these cuts, an average parish elementary school of 350 students will receive approximately \$15,750 less in direct reimbursement and \$34,300 less in resources and services, and a Catholic high school of 800 students will receive approximately \$36,000 less in direct reimbursement and \$78,000 less in resources and services.

We are extremely proud of the educational outcomes that our schools achieve. Catholic schools make a tremendous contribution to our State. In addition, Catholic and other chartered nonpublic schools save the taxpayers of Ohio \$2 billion a year in educational cost that the state would pay if these students were attending public schools. Our schools have a long history of public accountability for the public dollars and services they receive.

We are deeply disappointed in the legislative process that occurred during the conference committee on HB 1. Many legislators have told us that they disagree with the cuts made in benefits for students in Catholic schools, and with the lack of opportunity to voice their concerns or influence the conference committee process.

We strongly encourage you to find a nonpartisan way to remedy the cuts. We sincerely hope that you will address our concerns in the budget corrections bill. Please tell us how we can help you in this effort. Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Daniel E. Pilarczyk

Archbishop of Cincinnati,

Chairman of the Board, Catholic Conference of Ohio

July 27, 2009