

**Testimony in Opposition to H7163
Rhode Island House Committee on Finance
April 28, 2026**

Dear Honorable Committee Chair Abney and Committee Members:

The Rhode Island Catholic Conference offers this testimony in opposition to H7163. The Conference is the public policy representative of the Diocese of Providence, which encompasses nearly 600,000 Catholics statewide, their parishes, schools, and numerous charities, which combine to form our state's second-largest social service provider network, behind only our state government. Thousands of Rhode Islanders of all faiths and no faith daily benefit from the Catholic Church's charitable works.

Additionally, the Diocese of Providence is a top employer in the state, with over 2,500 employees working in our parishes, schools, offices, and charitable agencies. We also offer this testimony on behalf of the families of the nearly 12,000 students currently enrolled in the 36 elementary and secondary Catholic Schools in Rhode Island.

H7163. would prohibit Rhode Island from opting into the new federal education tax credit program, recently enacted for the benefit of public and nonpublic students. Here are three key points of utmost importance relative to the federal education tax credit:

- 1.) It costs the State of Rhode Island zero dollars to opt into;
- 2.) Is for the benefit of public, charter and nonpublic school students; and
- 3.) If Rhode Island does not opt in, Rhode Island dollars will leave Rhode Island for the benefit of students in other states.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2229) directly states, *“Parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own personal convictions. This right is fundamental”*

Education is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, which is why parents should choose the best education to their children. Sometimes that is a public school, and other times, a charter or nonpublic school. The federal tax credit empowers education organizations, including Scholarship Granting Organizations, to raise funds that can provide for special education, tutoring, summer and afterschool programs, education technology and the like. Parents can supplement their children’s education to the best of their needs through this funding and in a diversity of ways.

This bill is unjust and unequitable as it would take away the ability of economically poor parents and students to use funds contributed through SGOs for K-12 education expenses.

Catholic schools have a long tradition of serving diverse and underserved communities, offering a pathway to upward mobility. School choice allows students from low-income families to access these schools, addressing economic and racial disparities.

Church teaching highlights that parents have the primary right to choose their children's education. School choice is seen as ensuring that this fundamental right is not limited by a family's financial situation, aligning with the principle of subsidiarity, where decisions are made at the most local level, rather than by the state.

By providing tax credits, families can afford tuition at religious schools, providing a competitive alternative to underperforming public schools, particularly in urban, marginalized areas. The Supreme Court has held that excluding religious schools from school choice programs is discriminatory and unfair. Proponents argue that parents should not be forced to choose between their faith and a quality education.

We respectfully ask you to reject H7163 as it is unfair and unjust for the many families of Rhode Island who seek only the best path of education for their children.

The Reverend Bernad A. Healey
Director