

Testimony for 2.5 HB 1607

Chairperson and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the importance of school choice. My name is Nick Lee, and I serve as the principal of St. Catherine School. I am also a husband and the father of three boys. Before stepping into this role, I spent my early career as a teacher and coach in public schools, dedicated to helping students learn and grow.

My journey to St. Catherine School was, without question, part of God's plan. When I was called to serve as principal, I was also given an opportunity that my family deeply needed—the ability to bring my children to school with me. Our oldest son began his education in our local public school, and while he had wonderful teachers, he struggled for a number of reasons. As parents, we could see that he needed something different, but the reality was that affording a Catholic education wasn't easy for us. Without the opportunity that came with my role, I'm not sure we would have been able to send our boys to St. Catherine School, even though it has been where our oldest has truly thrived.

As a principal, I witness firsthand the sacrifices families make to provide their children with the education they believe is best. Parents carefully budget and spread tuition payments over 12 months to make Catholic education possible. I see families applying for tuition assistance, seeking any support to allow their children to grow in faith and academics. I see our parish community stepping in to help subsidize the cost because they, too, believe in the value of this education. I also see the families who long for a Catholic education but cannot afford it, no matter how much they stretch. Some piece together tuition from different sources—grandparents helping with part, parents covering the rest—but the financial burden remains too great for others.

School choice is not about competition between public and private schools but about ensuring parents can choose what is best for their children. Every family's situation is unique, and the ability to select the right educational environment should not be limited to those with financial means. Our public schools do great work, but they are not the right fit for every child. Families deserve options, and economic barriers should not determine whether a child can receive the education they need to thrive.

I support school choice because I have seen its impact on my own family and on countless others. I urge you to consider policies that empower parents to make the best decisions for their children, regardless of their income level. When families have true educational freedom, children win. Thank you for your time and consideration.