



**TESTIMONY by the  
FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC TEACHERS LOCAL 153 OPEIU AFL-CIO and the  
OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION (OPEIU)  
to the  
NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE & ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES  
EXECUTIVE BUDGET 2015-16 PROPOSAL FOR EDUCATION INVESTMENT TAX CREDIT  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2015**

Good morning. My name is Julia Pignataro

I am the president the Federation of Catholic Teachers, Local 153 of the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU), which represents 2,642 teachers teaching in the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of New York.

I am with Richard Lanigan, the Secretary-Treasurer of Local 153 for the Office and Professional Employees International Union.

**Support for Enactment of Education Investment Tax Credit**

We are here this morning to speak in support of Governor Cuomo's proposal for an Education Investment Tax Credit, included in his Executive Budget (Article VII bill number S.2006/A.3006 – Part E), the Education Investment Tax Credit proposal in the Assembly (A.2551) by Assembly-members Mike Cusick and Marcos Crespo and in the Senate (S.1976) by Senators Martin Golden and Simcha Felder.

Adoption of the Education Investment Tax Credit will have a direct and positive impact on the teachers teaching in the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of New York – teachers who are represented by the Federation of Catholic Teachers.

The positive impact of this legislation to our union membership would result from the expanded pool of scholarship funds available for children who attend, or could attend, a Catholic school in the Archdiocese. With more children able to access greater scholarship opportunities, we can stabilize the financial health of our Catholic schools and preserve the jobs of our member teachers.

As a reminder, the Archdiocese of New York comprises three of New York City's boroughs: Staten Island, Manhattan and the Bronx; and the counties of the lower and mid-Hudson Valley: Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Dutchess, Orange and Ulster.

### **Catholic School Closures = Lost Unionized Teacher Jobs**

The Archdiocese in just the last four years has closed nearly 60 Catholic schools, many of these affecting low-income, high-needs communities. As families struggle economically, low-income families in particular make enormous financial sacrifice to provide a Catholic school education for their children, even in what are very modestly-priced schools. These families have been steadily losing this financial struggle, resulting in fewer children being able to attend these schools.

As these schools close, our members, the dedicated teachers of Local 153, have suffered by losing their jobs. Since 2011, 628 Catholic school teachers in the Archdiocese alone have lost their jobs – a number that amounts to ***nearly 25 percent of our current membership***. As Catholic school enrollment trends continue, our remaining members are at risk of stagnant pay and at risk of further job losses.

This is alarming. This is painful. This is unacceptable.

Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature can address this crisis by enacting the proposed Education Investment Tax Credit.

It's important to note that these downward enrollment trends and recent school closures are not the result of poor academics or lack of demand by parents. It's financial. It's economic. In fact, our teachers face all the same challenges in teaching high-needs students in our Catholic schools, and have excelled.

As an example, in 11 of the 14 schools in New York City's poorest neighborhoods that were closed in 2013 by the Archdiocese, a higher percentage of students met or exceeded the state's English Language Arts standards compared to the respective community school district average. These areas included districts 7, 10, 11 and 12 in the Bronx, and districts 5 and 6 in Harlem.

But, low-income and working-class families in these and other areas continue to struggle as wages and upward mobility have stagnated. When they lose this struggle, and end up having to pull their child from one of our schools, this ripple effect leads to school closures and lost jobs.

This trend is likely to continue unless we do something to help these families by providing them the opportunity to afford the quality and values-based education they need for their children.

### **Education Investment Tax Credit Helps Teachers**

The Executive Budget's proposal for an Education Investment Tax Credit provides a very direct, immediate way for more children to be awarded scholarship opportunities in the Archdiocese and throughout the state in a variety of schools.

This proposal will not only help children remain in Catholic and other schools, but will help our teachers keep their jobs, increase their wages, and continue the superb work of serving some of our state's neediest children.

We thank Governor Cuomo for stepping up and advancing this important proposal for children and our union members. We thank the State Senate, which last month passed the Golden/Felder bill (S.1976) for

an Education Investment Tax Credit. And, we thank the State Assembly, where there is substantial and growing support for the Cusick/Crespo bill (A.2551) for an Education Investment Tax Credit.

**“Pro-Labor” Must Include Catholic Schoolteachers**

For New York State government to be truly known as “labor-friendly” or “pro-labor” – *this must include* teachers who labor in a religious or independent school.

The Federation of Catholic Teachers and OPEIU are part of a broader representation of organized labor in support of the Education Investment Tax Credit, including approximately two dozen organizations representing working families in law enforcement, firefighting, and building trades. Organized labor also is a part of a growing *InvestinED* coalition of organizations representing business, religious and nonprofit groups seeking New York State enactment of an Education Investment Tax Credit.

This proposed Education Tax Credit not only would spur millions of dollars in charitable donations to non-profit, preK-12 scholarship funds that could be awarded to students from low-income and middle-class households to attend a parochial or independent school; importantly, the tax credit would encourage charitable donations to public schools and community organizations that support them.

We also want to make clear that enacting this bill is a positive for schoolchildren and teachers in our schools in the Archdiocese and in other independent and parochial schools, and for children and teachers in public schools. As you know, Governor Cuomo is proposing a \$1.1 billion increase to public schools for next year, on top of the \$1 billion increase by the State Legislature for this year. We hope you in the Legislature add to this amount.

Importantly, as a tax proposal, state aid to public schools would be *unaffected* by including the Education Investment Tax Credit in the adopted state budget.

And, in the state financial plan, the Education Investment Tax Credit at \$100 million to \$300 million is modest yet meaningful for our members, with half of that for scholarships and half for public education.

**Catholic Schoolteachers at Great Risk without Education Investment Tax Credit**

Failure to pass this legislation will bring ongoing risk to our members in the Archdiocese and teachers throughout the state.

Governor Cuomo and the Legislature have done well by public schools, including charter schools. We applaud you for understanding the bigger picture; that is, *all* students and teachers can be helped with greater charitable support for scholarship funds and public schools.

Enacting the Education Investment Tax Credit would be an innovative way to help children and teachers continue a long-standing historic tradition of parochial education in New York State.

Enacting the Education Investment Tax Credit also would send a loud and clear message from the Governor and you in the Legislature that *all* students and *all* teachers matter; not some more than others.

Thank you for your time and your consideration in passing the Education Investment Tax Credit.