

Gerald D'Avolio Testimony

Committee on Education, Art and Humanities

In support of "An Act Establishing Early Education for All" (H.1838/S.239)

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

Good morning. My name is Gerry D'Avolio, and I am the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference. I am delighted to inform you that on March 22nd of this year, the Policy Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference unanimously endorsed H.1838/S.239, "An Act Establishing Early Education for All." It is abundantly clear that we must try to give every child the proper foundation for learning and life success.

The Catholic religion has long regarded the education of children, both in Catholic schools and in the family, as a foundation for a religious, spiritual and community-focused life. Catholic schools work to educate the total person: the intellectual, physical, affective, social, moral, aesthetic and religious. Catholic Canon law states that the faithful are to consider schools as of great importance, since they are the principal means of helping parents to fulfill their role in the education of their child. "Parents...are obliged and enjoy the right to educate their offspring; Catholic parents also have the duty and the right to select those means and institutions through which they can provide more suitably for the Catholic education of their children." (Canon 793)

A basic premise of Catholic philosophy is the holistic approach to education, where what happens in the classroom or in any one subject affects all that happens in the life of a child. Therefore, education beginning at a young age will lead to healthier classrooms, families and communities. The goals of the EEA Campaign are in line with the Catholic community's commitment to education, specifically for the betterment of accessibility and affordability of high-quality early education to all children, regardless of their religious faith.

There are 251 Catholic schools in the Commonwealth, many of which house early childhood programs. The Massachusetts Catholic Conference supports working with the existing mixed public and private system of early childhood programs including child care centers, public schools, faith-based and private schools, YMCAs, Head Start, Nursery schools, and family child care homes to meet the diverse needs of families in the State.

That is why the Massachusetts Catholic Conference is happy to join the Ten-Point Coalition, the JCRC, and the other members of the Early Education for All Advisory Committee in urging you to favorably consider the Early Education for All legislation.