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**Illinois State Board of Education
Finance and Audit Committee Hearing Testimony
September 15, 2009**

On behalf of the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI), representing Illinois' 510 Catholic schools, and approximately 600 other nonpublic schools, I am here to offer testimony in support of three grant programs in the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) budget. Due to the budget reductions in the current fiscal year, two of these programs are now unfunded and the third dramatically reduced.

ISBE should restore the funding for these important programs in their Fiscal Year 2011 budget proposal as they provide essential support for achieving ISBE's Strategic Plan Goals. The first two goals begin with the words "every student"; the last, with the words "every school." The greatness of the following three programs is that they also endeavor to serve all students and schools in Illinois – public and nonpublic.

First and foremost, the **Illinois Textbook Loan Program**: this program was authorized in 1975, and its purpose is to provide secular textbooks, and instructional computer software, to public and nonpublic students grades K-12. The great importance of this program stands out among the many grants in the ISBE budget. Students cannot learn or succeed without effective and up-to-date textbooks, and for over thirty years, this program has helped ensure accurate and up-to-date textbooks and other instructional materials are present in ALL schools.

The Textbook Loan Program operates in an extremely effective and efficient manner. Applications and orders are entirely web-based, so the administrative costs must be limited. Fully funded, the program provides approximately \$40 per student to use for the purchase of approved materials, and serves every grade on a two-year cycle: Kindergarten thru 6 one year; grades 7 thru 12 the next. In Fiscal Year 2009, this program was funded at \$42.8 million. Considering the widespread service of this program – and particularly its essential relation to the first goal of the ISBE's strategic plan of ensuring that every student demonstrates academic achievement and is prepared for success after high school – we hope and urge you to include the full funding of this program in your proposed Fiscal Year 2011 budget.

The second program is the **Educational Improvement and School Safety Block Grant**, also known as the ADA Block Grant. This profoundly important grant program provides public and nonpublic schools flexible resources to meet otherwise unfunded mandates. For nonpublic schools in particular, the statute requires the block grant work to provide reimbursements for local, state and federal health and safety mandates such as fingerprint-based criminal history checks, the purchase of Automated External Defibrillators, the implementation of School Crisis Plans, and many other expectations of fire, health and safety codes. The fact that the subject of these expenditures in

nonpublic schools are mandated by local, state and/or federal governments proves its alignment to the third goal of ISBE's strategic plan, which states "every school will offer a safe and healthy learning environment for all students."

In Fiscal Year 2009, this program was funded at \$74.8 million and broke down to approximately \$36 a student. Much like the Textbook Loan Program all the data submission for the grant is done online. The program is easy, efficient and very effective. Unfortunately, in the current fiscal year, funding was reduced by 75 percent. This simply is not enough to even come close to meeting the unfunded health and safety mandates of Illinois government. We strongly urge ISBE to restore funding to this important block grant.

Finally, we hope you will consider the restoration of the **Illinois Parent/Guardian State Pupil Transportation Reimbursement Program**. This program was authorized in 1986 and has provided financial assistance to public and nonpublic school families, grades K-12, to whom free bussing is not provided ever since. The fact is that although state law requires school districts to transport students of nonpublic schools, the requirement only applies to the routes and calendars of public schools. If the student or the nonpublic school does not reside on or near that route, which they usually do not, they are out of luck and must either be driven to school by their parents or find some other form of transportation. That being said, many public school parents also drive their own children to school and take advantage of the reimbursement. The families of children, who live within a mile and a half of the school, yet must be driven due to safety hazards are beneficiaries of the program as well.

Like the Textbook Loan and School Safety Block Grant, this program is web-based and operates easily and efficiently. In Fiscal Year 2009, the program was funded at \$12.1 million for an average reimbursement of \$100 per pupil, far less than the actual cost of transportation but much better than nothing. The truth is none of ISBE's Strategic Plan Goals can be met if all students cannot be easily and safely transported to schools. This program helps meet that need and is worthy of your support.

Hopefully, by now, you understand the unique and important nature of these three programs: that they meet important educational needs, closely aligned with your strategic goals, and serve all families, students and schools in Illinois. Please carefully consider these programs and do all you can to ensure funding at the highest possible level. CCI is committed to advocating on behalf of these programs in the next legislative session, and hope that you will be a partner in those efforts. Thank you and may God bless you all.