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**BY ELECTRONIC DELIVERY**

April 2, 2020

Dear Governor Pritzker & State Superintendent Ayala,

We know you are acutely aware of the damage COVID-19 has done to so many facets of life in Illinois. We thank you for the strong leadership roles you have taken on in these challenging times, and we are praying for your success.

We write today in order to address the issue of how our Catholic schools have been impacted by COVID-19. In response to the Governor's order, our schools have been closed since March 14, and we have undertaken strong efforts to keep our school families whole while educating their children through a variety of remote and e-learning techniques. We have also worked extremely hard to care for the needs of our schools' staff and families, providing meals when needed and other support as necessary. This is an incredible challenge for us all, but we are forging ahead.

Thankfully, the federal government recognized how difficult and costly this transition would be and included support for private schools in the recently enacted CARES Act. The Act provides support to schools through Section 18002, the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund, and Section 18003, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, and it stipulates that both of these funds, once the money reaches the Local Education Agency (LEA) level, provide equitable services for private schools:

Sec. 18005. (a) IN GENERAL – A local education agency receiving funds under sections 18002 or 18003 of this title shall provide equitable services in the same manner as provided under section 1117 of the ESEA of 1965 to students and teachers in nonpublic schools, as determined in consultation with representatives of nonpublic schools.

We are extremely grateful for the federal government's recognition of our important educational work and the adverse effects COVID-19 has had upon it. In particular, we are grateful to Chicago Mayor Lightfoot and Illinois Senator Durbin for their leadership in making sure these benefits were included in the CARES Act. And we rely now on your leadership to ensure the educational relief funding in the CARES Act is utilized as intended.

The first communication from the State Superintendent to schools on this issue that we are aware of was sent in an email on March 31, entitled "*ISBE Extension of Remote Learning through April 30 &*

*CARES Act*". Although this email accurately summarized the purpose of the CARES Act and noted that LEAs would receive the money, it did not mention that private schools are eligible for equitable services.

Obviously, there are many provisions of the CARES ACT, and we do not expect one email to include all of them. However, we do urge you and the State Superintendent to help us educate LEAs as to their responsibilities to ensure all students and teachers are served. Our schools and Diocesan Offices of Education will be reaching out to LEAs, and it will be extremely helpful if they were receiving the same information from their leaders.

It is worth pointing out that the presence of Catholic schools in Illinois is significant. Collectively, we serve approximately 130,000 students in 461 schools. We have been grateful for our partnership with various state agencies and are confident that we can continue to work positively together through the current COVID-19 response. Thank you again for your attention to this matter in the midst of this public health crisis, and thank you again for your leadership. If we can be of any assistance, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Rigg  
Superintendent, Archdiocese of Chicago

Rev. John Belmonte  
Superintendent, Diocese of Joliet

Mr. Mike Kagan  
Superintendent, Diocese of Rockford

Dr. Sharon Weiss  
Superintendent, Diocese of Peoria

Ms. Brandi Borries  
Superintendent, Diocese of Springfield

Mr. Jonathan Birdsong  
Superintendent, Diocese of Belleville

CC: Dan Hynes, Deputy Governor  
Jesse Ruiz, Deputy Governor