



**OFFICE OF THE CARDINAL
1011 FIRST AVENUE
NEW YORK, NY 10022**

April 8, 2014

Dear Parents/Teachers/Friends and Supporters of our children in Catholic Education:

I owe you an update. I should have written last week, when we got the bad news, but, I was too mad, and my confessor always tells me to *wait* before I write or say anything!

Many of you have contacted me, as well as our New York State Catholic Conference in Albany, asking how in the world the very promising and widely supported *Education Investment Tax Credit* could have been left out of the New York State Budget. We had been told – promised, really, by so many in leadership positions in Albany – that this was the year that the bill would be passed. Most of the members of the State Senate (including the Senate Majority Leader, Senator Dean Skelos), a clear majority of the members of the State Assembly (although *not* the Speaker), and our Governor were all in favor of the bill. The phrase we heard over and over was “it’s a no-brainer. It’s a done deal.”

Well, with some chagrin, I have to admit that a “done deal” in Albany apparently does not mean what you and I think it means – that something will actually get done. I am frustrated, disappointed, and angry. Based on your calls and inquiries, it’s clear that many of you are frustrated and upset as well. As of today, I still have not heard why the promised credit did not go through.

This is particularly upsetting as the bishops of New York State went all out in support of this issue this year. We partnered with many union leaders, business executives, representatives of diverse faith groups, parents, and teachers, all of whom were united in their enthusiastic support of this bill. There were huge rallies in Buffalo and Yonkers, personal meetings with Governor Cuomo, Senator Skelos, and others (who all pledged their support to get this bill passed!), press conferences and interviews...all with the goal of doing something to help the 200,000 kids in our Catholic schools throughout New York State, and the parents who work hard to pay tuition to send them there. We even met with the public school teachers’ union, to show them that this tax credit would not take a single dime from the public schools, would help drive private money to public schools, and even reimburse their members for out-of-pocket expenses. (I am proud and happy to say that our Catholic school teacher’s union was steadfast in their support of the tax credit.)

You know the great job that our schools do; that’s why you enthusiastically support them. I don’t need to recount all the statistics – 98% of our students graduate high school, 95% go on to

college, etc. As one of the Regents for the State of New York said to me, “You do twice as good a job [as the public schools] at one-half the cost.” That about sums it up.

I don’t want to criticize the public schools. I want them to succeed. Most of our Catholic children are in public schools, and I want them, and all children, to have the best education possible. As I said in my op-ed in the *New York Post*, the state found money in the budget for education, including, I’m happy to note, new expenditures for charter schools and pre-K programs, and the usual whopping expenditures for public schools. I’m glad they did, but it is amazing and even a little insulting that they can’t find less than 0.1% of the budget to help fund scholarship organizations that assist the 10% of New York kids outside the public school monopoly.

Some of you have suggested that we Catholic leaders are too nice, too civil, in our dealings with politicians, and it’s time we “take off the gloves” and get down to bare-knuckle political brawling. Others suggest that, if the State refuses to do anything to support Catholic schools, despite the excellent education we provide to children of *all* religions, or none at all, particularly in the inner-city, that we should close our doors to all non-Catholic students and dedicate our resources just to educating Catholic kids. As much as a part of me understands and even sympathizes with these points of view, that’s not who we are or what we’re about, particularly when it comes to our sacred obligation to provide a quality education to all who seek it.

Catholic and other non-public schools in New York State (Catholic schools being, by far, the majority) save the state over *\$9 billion* each year. What would our counties, cities, and the state do if those schools disappeared? But, the politicians can’t seem to find any way to support our schools. (You may hear that the State is coming up with some extra money to begin to reimburse the schools for certain services that the government mandates we perform. While we’re relieved that their money is at last beginning to be paid, that is money that we have been owed by the State, for years, not new money. We’ve been “out of pocket” for those expenses all along, and the new budget still doesn’t pay us back all of what we are owed.)

There are two times, it seems, when most politicians do take notice of our schools. The first is when they contact us trying to get a child into one of our schools. The second is when there aren’t enough parents able to pay the tuition to support a school, and it has to close. Then there is plenty of grandstanding and handwringing from elected leaders about how great our schools are, and how mean the bishops are to close one of them, but almost never anything in the way of assistance.

I was grateful for Seth Lipsky’s article in April 3’s *New York Post*, in which he called for “an end to New York’s anti-Catholic bigotry” that is embodied in the State’s *Blaine amendment*, which prohibits any tax money from ever being used to support a religious-sponsored school. Surely that would be a welcome first step in acknowledging the important role that Catholic and other private, religious, schools have in educating our young people.

Finally, in reflecting on our current situation, I was reminded of the first time that my brother bishops from around New York and I met with Governor Cuomo subsequent his inauguration. After a very cordial and productive meeting, the Governor looked around the table at us and said, “Usually when I meet with people they are arguing on behalf of a bill or program

that will benefit them or their business. You've just spent the last 45 minutes speaking with me on behalf of the poor, the homeless, poor children in your schools, mothers and their babies, those in prison, the undocumented...all the people who normally don't have a voice here in Albany. What a refreshing and uplifting exchange." For those who would say that the Church has "lost its clout" in New York, I'd argue (as I think Pope Francis would as well) that it's not supposed to be about "clout" but about *servicing* people. That's why we have been so adamant in our support of the *Education Investment Tax Credit*, and why we will continue to be a voice for those who are normally not heard!

Unfortunately, there is not a lot of "good news" in this update. What is encouraging is the broad range of people who are committed to eventually making the *Education Investment Tax Credit* a reality, as it – or similar support – is available in 19 other states and the District of Columbia. I am deeply grateful to all of you who wrote or called to express your enthusiasm for the tax credit, and I ask that you remain steadfast in your support. Yes, it's a "Good Friday" moment, but there's always an Easter!

Faithfully in Christ,



Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York