

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY THE
KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE
LABOR RELATIONS COMMITTEE
OF THE
PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HOUSE BILL 2626

HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

AUGUST 18, 2008

**TESTIMONY OF
THEODORE E. CLATER, Pd.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

I am Ted Clater, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to present information that should assist each member of this committee as they ponder the implications of HB 2626 and any similar idea that comes to the legislature or our society in the future.

The Keystone Christian Education Association is a statewide network of independent Christian schools that follow the historic orthodox doctrine and patterns of the Protestant faith community. These independent schools function as part of the overall evangelical movement and are either controlled by, supported by, or in alignment with local churches in their own geographic areas. While independent, through KCEA these schools work together for the achievement of goals that would assist the individual student, family, and school, and, in general, the movement.

It will assist you today in understanding our testimony if you remember that:

The evangelical movement has as foundational truth that the Bible is Jehovah's inerrant revelation to man, that Jesus Christ is part of the Trinitarian godhead, that He died a sacrificial death on Calvary to pay the price for man's sin, and that individuals who place their personal faith in that substitutionary death are the recipients of eternal life in heaven instead of hell. Placing one's personal faith in Christ is far more than mental assent to historic facts, saying a prayer, being born into a religious family, identifying with a church, or living a certain lifestyle.

An evangelical church is one where the members each have made the personal decision for this salvation and have indicated that they wish to join the faith community in a covenant relationship to proclaim the Gospel to others and to assist each other in Christian living. There is some significant variant in how evangelical churches organize their decision-making process and govern or administer their congregational affairs. To use an ecclesiastical term, this is church polity, and the differences are based upon interpretations of several Scripture passages. Typically, the adherents organize diverse

programs to fulfill their covenant relationship within the faith community. One of the programs often created by and for the children in these communities is the Christian school.

An evangelical Christian school is a community of individuals of faith who are joined together around the mission of educating children where biblical truth is integrated with all other learning. This is true of pre-school, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. This is true whether the community is centered upon a single sponsoring church, a group of sponsoring churches, or Christian leaders or families who join together for a mutual Christian purpose. In the simplest terms, the community of believers that composes a school chooses individuals to staff their institution as they believe they are qualified to help the faith community fulfill its spiritual goals.

Our attempts to help you understand why KCEA must stand in strong opposition to HB 2626, and why the evangelical movement would oppose this bill, come in two parts. First, we reiterate that about two months ago I wrote a three-page letter to each of you as committee members. In that letter I informed you that our Association would oppose HB 2626. Today, I attach a copy of my earlier letter and provide this summary:

The appeal for action toward the enactment of HB 2626 appears to be the desire to have government mediation of employee/employer relations. The “findings” section of the bill has been developed to explain or justify a proposed change in the law. The “findings” clearly seek to declare that government involvement in employee/employer relations for ordained, commissioned, and licensed staff at religious institutions is not being attempted, presumably because these workers deal with sacred or religious matters. However, the “findings” section clearly asserts that all other staff at religious institutions are in desperate need of governmental intervention. However, from the perspective of evangelical experience, the supposed “facts” are erroneous. In summary, the picture that the proponents of HB 2626 seek to paint is totally inaccurate when placed side by side with the historic and present practices of evangelical Christian schools, including those of the KCEA. Again, I have attached a copy of my previous letter and commend its content for your review. These details are foundationally related to this further testimony.

The second part of our attempts to help you understand why KCEA and the evangelical movement oppose HB 2626 comes through illustration. As a panel of four Christian men, we will personally illustrate how each of us has been involved in Christian education in our local community of believers and how these communities function with their schools.

Personally, I am an ordained minister of the Gospel, but I have no official capacity in the local church where I have had my membership and involvement. As with many other churches of evangelical faith, our church is congregational in governance. We as a congregation have established our own Constitution and By-laws. We as a congregation choose our pastor, deacons, and officers, and these individuals fulfill important tasks of leadership. We all as congregants are involved in tasks within the church as our talents prepare us, and all of us as congregants are involved in our joint decision-making, each adult member having one vote in our business sessions. Like the average church member, I have been called upon by the church leadership to use my talents, and I have led the choir, taught Sunday School classes, led congregational singing, preached, worked with the youth, and even gotten dirty with grounds-keeping tasks.

My wife and I have been blessed with three children, and these children attended the Christian school at our church for grades pre-school through 12. We as parents were not part of the official school staff in any capacity. However, as members of the congregation, and as parents with students in the school, we were deeply involved in the joint effort by our religious community to train our children. We the congregation received input and leadership from the pastor, from deacons, from teachers, and from each other. We discussed and voted on a full range of policy decisions and budget items. We voted on teacher salary scales just as we voted on pastoral salaries and all major expense items as specified in our church Constitution. We empowered our pastoral staff and church officers to administer the details of the school between congregational meetings. We also provided venues whereby families outside our church could join with us in this educational mission; and they provided input, support, and expertise as families who were in spiritual agreement with our congregation joined us in this religious endeavor.

As our children graduated from high school, my wife and I guided our students as they matriculated at a distinctly Christian college. Here again, even though I was an ordained member of the clergy, I was just an ordinary parent member of the diverse group that composed our Christian college family – board of trustees, administration, faculty, staff, parents, students, friends, all Christians of like faith working together training Christian students. As ordinary parents, we attended parent meetings, read mail, provided input and prayer support, and supplied parental guidance and encouragement for our children to fully support the student covenant that determined a common set of expectations for all students so that the community of believers could be effective in its purpose. Yes, our input included our assessment of the effectiveness of faculty and staff in their roles; and, yes, our input included paying tuition as the trustees wrestled with the budget priorities; but, just as with our church school, we as a community worked together and determined our course.

On this panel is also Dr. Jeff Hollier with his background in higher education with responsibilities in programmatic quality control. As a Christian, Jeff is active with his wife as they are raising a pre-school daughter. They have the knowledge and desire to identify the educational experiences that will properly guide their child. Jeff happens to be an important educator of the medical doctors of our community, but he is also a layman involved in the community that composes his local church. Jeff teaches adult-level Bible studies, serves as an usher, and is involved in other leadership capacities. This spiritual community plans an array of activities to foster spiritual growth in the children and adults in attendance. Church decision-making includes pastoral leadership, an elder board, and deacons along with congregational voting. The spiritual leaders of this congregation encourage the families to become part of the Christian community that composes local Christian schools.

Jay Lucas will also share insights. While Jay is a pastor of a congregation, he has diverse knowledge and experience from the perspective of a teacher in a Christian institution. He has been a teacher in a Christian high school, and both his mother-in-law and brother-in-law have been long-term teachers in Christian schools. He has also been an adjunct professor at two Christian colleges. Additionally, several members of his congregation are teachers at a Christian school in their city. Besides his experience and knowledge of Christian school faculty, he

observes how the families of his church join with families from other like-minded churches as they support a Christian school in their city. He can then provide insight (a) from the perspective of a Christian school faculty member and (b) as one who observes how Christian families join together as a religious community to educate their children, including how they make decisions together that will affect the entire religious community composing the school.

Mr. Reed is a Christian layman who happens to be an attorney by trade. He and his wife set high expectations for the type of institutional policies they desired in a Christian day school and in a Christian college and became part of the religious community that sponsored the schools they chose. At different time periods, they utilized the Christian school where they had their church membership, one sponsored by a neighboring congregation, and one administered by an independent board of Christian leaders. Later, they chose strong Christian colleges. Greg has also been an asset in his church. While he has formal Bible training, he is not ordained but serves in his local church just as other laymen. On occasion he has been asked to serve as a pastor, to preach and teach, and to carry other leadership responsibilities in his church. Throughout the past 30 years he has been called upon by diverse congregations and Christian schools to provide guidance and counsel, even mediation. He also remains active preaching and teaching in the congregations across Pennsylvania as they request.



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June 18, 2008

The Honorable Eddie Day Pashinski
 Pennsylvania House of Representatives
 House Post Office
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Dear Representative Pashinski:

Regarding House Bill 2626, a fellow Representative requested to know our Association's position on the bill. In addition to notifying him of our position, it is appropriate for me to correspond with you as the prime sponsor.

The Keystone Christian Education Association was founded in 1974 as a cooperative effort of diverse independent religious schools across the Commonwealth. The diversity of the doctrinal positions of these schools would include four major doctrinal groups: Baptist, Methodist, Bible/Congregational, and Presbyterian. The age groups of students served begins with "nursery school"-age and continues through collegiate and graduate education.

Our Association must strongly oppose this bill. Furthermore, I would fully expect that the full range of Protestant institutions will oppose this bill for the same reasons as I provide with several brief summaries:

- A. The word choices and content give evidence that someone involved in the drafting process is familiar with some aspects of the history of Catholic education. However, there is no indication that there is equal familiarity with other religious education groups that historically have been and are part of our culture.
- B. The proposed "findings" in the bill are badly flawed, and I will provide illustrations. Yet, assertions are made which, if enacted, would affect all religious bodies.
 1. Protestant educational institutions permeated the United States during the Colonial Period, they have existed during each period since then, and they exist today in significant numbers. The typical teacher during the Colonial Period was the "parson," the pastor of the church (and in higher education, often a seminary-trained individual). It was not during the early 1900s but during the mid-1800s when religious schools increasingly utilized ladies and gentlemen from the



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congregations as classroom teachers as the pastors provided supervision. The majority of schools transitioned to publicly funded institutions but with Protestant zeal, and then came secularization and ultimately the removal of Bible and prayer. This resulted in the evangelical rebirth of large numbers of religious day schools in the mid and late 1900s. Today, as in the late 1800s, the clergy have been involved in leadership roles but are in the minority in the teaching corps of these schools.

2. The teachers for all age groups in modern Christian education movements in the broad evangelical community are chosen for their personal adherence to the tenets of the faith of the institutions where they minister to the students. With any employment interview, candidates is closely examined for their qualifications to transmit the faith to the students. They are examined as to their personal lifestyle. They are examined as to how they will be involved in the other ministries of the local church that administers the institution or in the ministries of one of the sponsoring churches. It can also be noted that the same examination occurs for supportive staff including secretaries, aides, bus drivers, and janitorial and maintenance staff. Regardless of job classification, the spiritual testimony and work of the adults around the children must match with institutional goals. Each adult is to be a role model to the students and families.
3. The issue of whether a teacher holds clergy status or not has nothing to do with whether a religious education institution is religious. Many educational institutions are genuinely religious and fulfilling a deeply religious mission even when they have no clergy in any administrative capacity. The educational goals of the institution and the content of the teaching determine the doctrine, character, and values being transmitted. Regardless of my professional preferences to the contrary, a religious institution could even hire some "unbelieving" staff while fulfilling its religious mission (but if and as they do so, I fear they jeopardize the success of their mission).
4. The issue of whether a teacher is paid or not has nothing to do with whether a religious education institution is religious. Both paid staff and unpaid staff fulfill valuable roles in all types of genuinely religious organizations, each assisting in the accomplishment of the designed religious mission.
5. The issue of paid staff paying taxes and receiving police, fire, and public health services is mute. All citizens, whether clergy or not, whether working for a religious institution or not, are to be paying appropriate taxes and are to receive core governmental services and protections.
6. What is occurring in the many facets of religious education in this Commonwealth *is clearly not* "commerce" as this bill seeks to redefine the term.

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- C. It has been the pattern of experience in the United States that it is most imprudent for secular government to attempt to supervise the affairs of religious institutions, seeking to evaluate whether the decisions of a religious body are religiously based and/or justified in the minds of those outside the religious institution. I encourage you to ponder this parallel example: Regarding unemployment compensation coverage, while "every employer" is required to participate and "every employer's" actions are subject to governmental review, legislative bodies and the courts have consistently determined it inappropriate for religious institutions to be required to participate. As much as one may make a case that some worker might be disadvantaged due to unjustified action by a religious employer (leading to unemployment without compensation), the disadvantages that come with government intrusion into religion are far greater. The content of HB2626 comes down on the other side, proposing for government to evaluate decisions by religious institutions.

I would look forward to working with you on any issue where we have common agreement. However, on this bill, I must give you the advanced knowledge that I consider the bill to be a great threat to religious liberty.

Sincerely,



Rev. Theodore E. Clater, Pd.D.
Executive Director

TEC:sc

cc: Rep. Robert E. Belfanti, Jr., Majority Chairman
Rep. Gene DiGirolamo, Minority Chairman