



March 10, 2021

RE: Senate Education Finance and Policy Committee testimony in support of S.F. 966 (Fateh)

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Chair Chamberlain and Members of the Committee:

The Minnesota Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota, supports S.F. 966, which protects the ability of people of faith to observe holy days and other religious observances, so that they do not have to choose between their education and their worship obligations.

We are glad that some members of the Islamic community have brought this forward, and we are glad to join with them and people of other faiths testifying in support.

As society becomes more diverse and fewer people identify as religious, the need for stronger religious accommodation laws increases. The bill ensures that parents are informed of their district's policy regarding absences for religious observances, clarifying that families can request accommodations for religious observances, and that reasonable attempts must be made to meet those requests.

Similarly, school boards should look to community practices with respect to religion and honor those observances when crafting school calendars.

Such policies benefit all people of faith irrespective of creed. Catholics can benefit from this bill when they seek to be excused for Good Friday or Holy Days of Obligation. Muslims can observe Eid. Jews can more freely participate in Rosh Hashanah.

This nation has always gone out of its way to accommodate and protect religious observance because of the founders' firm belief that religious observance helps foster citizens who have the virtues and commitment to the common good necessary for a political order based on government by the people, of the people, and for the people. People who can govern themselves do not need big government to impose order. In other words, robust protections and accommodation for religion benefit the common good.

We do not support this bill because we believe all religions are the same or equally valid. Rather, we believe that every individual person has the right and obligation to respond to the call of the Creator consistent with his or her conscience and offer the Creator God worship.

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This bill protects that basic right rooted in our nature as persons who need access to both spiritual and material goods to flourish. Please vote yes today.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Adkins".

Jason Adkins, Esq.

Executive Director

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