

November 7, 2011

Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. 1st Street
Springfield, Illinois 62777

100 W. Randolph, Suite 14-300
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Re: Textbook Block Grant Program – Fiscal Year 2013 Proposed Budget

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of St. Laurence Catholic School in Elgin, Illinois, I urge the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to recommend funding for the Textbook Block Grant Program in the Fiscal Year 2013 proposed budget.

Formerly known as the Illinois Textbook Loan Program, the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) and the Illinois Coalition of Nonpublic Schools (ICNS) worked with ISBE in the 2011 spring legislative session to redesign the program as embodied in House Bill 3115, now Public Act 97-0570. This was done at ISBE's request to help streamline and improve the program and in hopes that your agency would support future funding.

Beginning in 1975, the program provides secular textbooks and instructional computer software to public and nonpublic students grades K-12. Students cannot learn or succeed without effective and up-to-date learning materials, 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. In Fiscal Year 2009, the program provided 849,214 instructional items to pupils in grades 7 through 12. There may not be any grant programs in ISBE's budget that have had as far-reaching an impact for as long a time. Providing good textbooks and instructional materials to children is a fundamental responsibility of the state, and this is the only state program that requires all its resources be spent on learning materials for students in classrooms.

In Fiscal Year 2009, this program was funded at \$42.8 million. We understand it is unrealistic to expect that level of funding could be restored in one year, but we do recommend that the program's funding be restored at some level. The Illinois State Senate included \$9.5 million for this program in its most recent budget bill. Additionally, we have appropriations bills (HB 1199 & SB 1964) with many co-sponsors pending in both the House and Senate.

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 funding of this program in your proposed Fiscal Year 2013 budget. We remain committed to continued advocacy on behalf of this program in the next legislative session and hope that you will be a partner in those efforts. Thank you.

Respectfully,

St. Laurence Catholic School