

Mr. Chairman, my name is Briana LeClaire, and I am executive director of The Idaho Federation of Independent Schools, representing private schools. Thank you for allowing me a few minutes today to introduce our organization.

There are 124 private independent schools in Idaho serving more than 11,000 students. The Idaho Federation of Independent Schools came into being to promote and protect independent schools' freedom to educate children well. Our members range across the ideological spectrum, but bringing them together is the shared belief that freedom of educational opportunity leads to personal and community growth.

As this committee and the larger legislative body act to improve k-12 education in Idaho, please keep a few things in mind.

The median tuition for an Idaho private elementary school is \$3,550, and the median high school tuition is only slightly more than \$5,000. That of course means that half of Idaho's independent schools charge less. Even so, 94 percent of Idaho's independent schools offer tuition assistance.

Idaho's private independent schools serve some of the neediest students. For example, right now there are eight students in the Cole Valley Christian Schools who are current or former residents of the Boise Rescue Mission's City Light Home for Women and Children. Cole Valley sponsors their tuitions 100 percent, and they may stay for free until graduation.

All of Idaho's independent schools work to keep costs low and serve as many students as possible. Nevertheless, there are at least 2,250 private school seats available right now. They aren't empty for lack of demand: although only 3 percent of Idaho schoolchildren are enrolled in independent schools, 27 percent of Idaho parents would choose a private school as their first option.

There are many things the Idaho Legislature could do to help Idahoans close the independent school choice gap. The current Museums, Schools and Libraries tax credit is due to sunset at the end of this year, and the Legislature should renew it. There are examples in many states of ways policymakers have encouraged private school choice at no net cost to the state such as tax credit tuition scholarships, and educational savings accounts. I'd be happy to discuss those with you.

A well-educated populace is in everyone's best interests. In a state with acknowledged educational difficulties, it is a scandal that there are more than 2000 seats available today in proven, excellent schools that just happen to be private. The Idaho Federation of Independent Schools doesn't want more tax money, and we don't want anyone attending a school their parents don't want them in. What we want is a level playing field for independent schools so that all who would choose them are able to do so. True school choice is the rising tide that will raise all Idahoans.

Thank you for your time Mr. Chairman, and I welcome your questions.