

DANIELLE FRIEL OTTEN, MEMBER
155TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

34 EAST WING
P.O. BOX 202155
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17120-2155
(717) 783-5009
FAX: (717) 772-2943

631 POTTSTOWN PIKE
EXTON, PENNSYLVANIA 19341
(484) 200-8259
TOLL-FREE: (833) 787-3176
FAX: (484) 200-8269



House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

COMMITTEES

EDUCATION
ENVIRONMENTAL & NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION
GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT
HEALTH
HUMAN SERVICES
LIQUOR CONTROL

June 24, 2026

Most Reverend Nelson J. Pérez, D.D.
Archbishop of Philadelphia
1601 Cherry Street, Suite 1100
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102-1310

Dear Archbishop Pérez,

I was educated by the Sisters of St. Joseph at St. Helena's School and Cardinal Dougherty in Philadelphia, a working-class neighborhood, Irish Catholic, a multigenerational place where nobody had much, but everybody cared for each other. Those women formed my conscience. They taught me that telling the truth matters and greed is a sin.

You grew up the son of Cuban refugees in West New York, New Jersey, educated in public schools your whole childhood. You spent years doing the unglamorous work of building bridges in communities that were changing faster than people were comfortable with. You were pastor of Saint Agnes Parish in West Chester. I was a parishioner there for many years as a young adult attending West Chester University, and then for the years that I lived in the borough, I attended Mass in your church. We did not grow up in the same place, but I believe we grew up with the same understanding of what it means to have very little, to find dignity in faith and community, and to carry that with you when the world gives you more than you started with. "There but by the grace of God go I." I think you probably feel that too.

Which is why I have deep concerns about a statement sent in your name regarding House Bill 2632, and why I need to ask you something before I get to the facts of this bill. This institution has a history of choosing whom to protect and whom to leave behind. The Philadelphia Archdiocese was the subject of grand jury investigations in 2005 and 2011. Those reports documented systematic abuse of children by clergy and a coordinated cover-up by church leadership. Priests who served in the schools I attended are named in those reports. I know survivors personally. When survivors asked for the civil lookback window that would have given them their day in court, this Archdiocese fought them. Still, to this day, the Church is fighting them. It has chosen to protect the institution over the children, every single time. I am not raising

this to wound you or to deflect; I am raising it because the statement that came from your Office of Communications on June 23 asks Pennsylvania legislators to protect yet another system with no accountability, no transparency, and no data. My question for you is, who is this institution choosing to protect now? Because the secrecy does not serve our children; it never did.

Here is what your statement said. Here is what is actually true.

Your statement said HB 2632 eliminates EITC and OSTC scholarship programs. What the bill does is modify programs that were designed to circumvent Article III, Section 15 of the Pennsylvania Constitution: “No money raised for the support of the public schools of the Commonwealth shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school.” That has been the law since 1874. While some might argue that these programs are unconstitutional altogether, HB 2632 does not eliminate one dollar from the programs, contrary to what you have stated to thousands of parishioners and families in Philadelphia and beyond. Your statement fails to mention that this bill simultaneously replaces the EITC and OSTC programs with a reformed Education Options Tax Credit in 2027-2028, with \$680 million in credits, the same dollar amount that exists today, to allow for MORE, not fewer, people to access these opportunities, and to direct these scholarships where the most real need exists, with real accountability and Auditor General oversight. That is reform, not elimination.

Your letter said these programs serve children from “challenging financial circumstances.” The income limit under the existing program is \$130,710 for a family of four. The median household income in Philadelphia is \$60,521. In Coatesville it is \$59,256. These programs currently serve families earning more than double what a typical Philadelphia or Coatesville family brings home. Current state law prohibits collecting data on who actually receives these scholarships. We do not know who benefits because the law that created the EITC and OSTC programs was deliberately written to make sure no one can check.

Your letter said these programs reduce taxpayer burdens. Let me tell you exactly whose burden they reduce. Under this program, a corporate donor can contribute \$200,000, receive a \$180,000 state tax credit, claim the full \$200,000 as a federal charitable deduction, and walk away with a \$54,000 profit on what is marketed as charity. That is not charity. That is a tax shelter with religious cover on top of it. Pennsylvania’s wealthiest billionaires were the top beneficiaries, collectively contributing tens of millions and receiving tens of millions in credits, and then some, in return. Meanwhile, the senior citizens in West Brandywine Township and other communities across the state pay the difference. Twin Valley School District, 19.5% property tax increase in four years. Kennett Consolidated, 12.8%. Coatesville, 12.3%. These programs may reduce the burden of wealthy taxpayers, but that burden does not disappear. It shifts to the people least able to carry it. That is not a program for the poor. That is a program designed for the very wealthy to avoid accountability.

Reeceville Elementary in my legislative district, along with the other elementary schools in the Coatesville Area School District, lost its school library because the state failed its constitutional

obligation to fund public education adequately. The district was able to bring the libraries back only after federal COVID relief and the fair funding lawsuit forced more adequate state investment. These are not failing schools; these are schools the system has failed.

I represent one of the wealthiest legislative districts in Pennsylvania. Many families in my district benefit from EITC and OSTC programs. Their children receive scholarships, and I am not asking those children to give back one dollar, or to forego one dollar in the future. What I am asking is that going forward we know who is actually receiving these benefits and that billionaires who have the potential to make a 27% profit on what they told us was a gift to the poor are required to be honest about what is actually happening. That is not an attack on Catholic education or Catholic school families. That is an ask for honesty and justice for the people who are forced to pick up the difference.

The Sisters of St. Joseph formed me. They taught me to ask who benefits and who pays. I believe the man who said “we’ve lost our moral compass” in 2018 in the face of family detentions in immigrant communities should be asking hard questions about who asked your Office of Communications to put out that statement and why.

I am asking for the opportunity to meet with you, not as adversaries but as two people who understand what it means to need a community to invest in you before you were able to invest in yourself, and who owe it to where we came from to tell the truth about who this system actually serves.

I would be honored to sit with you, and I look forward to the opportunity to schedule time to meet with you face to face to discuss the ways in which we can collectively serve the people of Pennsylvania in a way that is honest, fair, and just.

With respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danielle Friel Otten". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Danielle Friel Otten
State Representative
Pennsylvania House District 155

Cc: Mr. Kenneth A. Gavin, Chief Communications Officer, Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Mrs. Teresa Dellicompagni, President, Bishop Shanahan High School
Dr. Robert Moran, Principal, Bishop Shanahan High School
Pennsylvania Catholic Conference
House Democratic Leadership