

Congress keeps teachers in loan program

Catholic school teachers will be able to take advantage of a college loan forgiveness program after the U.S. Congress passed HR 2669 Sept. 7 - including nonpublic schoolteachers in the program.

An earlier Senate version of the bill alarmed many Catholic educators by limiting the benefit to public school teachers.

"It's very good news," said Mary Ellen Russell, associate director for education and family life with the Maryland Catholic Conference.

"It's an issue that is near and dear to our hearts because it's a matter of justice for our teachers," she said.

The measure provides for a college loan cancellation provision for those employed at least 10 years in a public-service position. The bill also allows for upfront annual tuition assistance to eligible undergraduate and graduate students who pursue teaching careers in certain public or private schools, Ms. Russell said.

The Maryland Catholic Conference had issued an electronic "action alert" urging Catholics to write letters to their lawmakers to restore the benefit when it looked like it may have been eliminated.

"Our hope was that the exclusion of nonpublic schoolteachers was simply an oversight," said Ms. Russell. "It seems pretty clear that that oversight was corrected. It's an encouraging sign that the needs of our school community continue to be recognized in federal programs."

Ms. Russell said it is very likely President George W. Bush will sign the bill into law.

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