

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1281

Rep. Sebastian Ertelt

ND District 26

Chairman Headland and Fellow Members of the Finance and Taxation Committee,

For the record, I am Representative Sebastian Ertelt representing North Dakota District 26, which includes all of Sargent County, the eastern half of Dickey County, the southern half of Ransom County, and the western half of Richland County.

House Bill 1281 would provide an income tax credit for either non-public or home education. The provisions are a \$2,000 credit per student, limited by duration of enrollment and individual tax liability, with a three year carry forward period.

While state public education is funded in part by property tax, the vast share is from state revenue including individual income tax. This is why the proposal is for an income tax credit. Keep in mind that a tax credit is a recognition that the tax is not due. These are not public dollars – they belong to the individual.

At a school district's discretion, home educated students may be enrolled part-time at a public school. If the student receives nonpublic or home education for less than the entire school year, but more than half the year, the credit is reduced by 50%. If the student receives nonpublic or home education for less than half of the school year then no credit is available.

The carry forward period gives a better chance for those with a lower tax liability to claim the credit so that those with a higher tax liability are not given an advantage.

House Bill 1281 seeks to give credit where credit is due. You will likely here from opponents of the bill, that there should be no reward or incentive for such education, because it is a parent's choice. I agree insofar as it is a parent's choice – a choice which saves taxpayers over \$10,000 each year. A choice that is not one of convenience, but one of deep care and high cost.

At the time of preparing this testimony, there has not been a fiscal note attached to this bill. Any fiscal note will pale in comparison to the amount that non-public and home education save the state every year. There are approximately 10,000 students enrolled in non-public and home schools in grades K through 12. The base state aid payment per student is \$10,036. That is over \$100 Million in savings EVERY YEAR! The reality is that nonpublic and home education has saved the state taxpayers billions of dollars. It is time for the legislature to recognize that.

But more than a choice which saves taxpayers a substantial amount of money, the education of a child is an inherent right and duty of a parent. Should parents who choose non-public or home education instead of public school be punished for exercising that right and duty? That is what the legislature has been telling and doing to these parents and their children for years. Let's stop punishing parents for exercising their right and fulfilling their duty to educate their children.

Chairman Headland and fellow Members of the Finance and Taxation Committee, I thank you for your time today and urge a unanimous DO PASS recommendation on House Bill 1281.