

Testimony on HB 1532

January 31, 2023

Chairman Elkin and Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Nate Harling, and I STRONGLY support school choice and HB 1532.

In today's age, parents need to have options that best suits their children's needs, choose educational facilities that offer smaller class sizes, or instill religious and moral values that can't be taught at public schools. However, my testimony will instead focus on two issues that those in opposition of HB 1532 seem to focus on – the feared loss of funding for public schools and the North Dakota State Constitution.

Loss of funding:

The Committee surely understands that school district tax collections cannot be redirected to private schools or taxpayers as tuition reimbursement. Most supporters of school choice are not advocating for slashing public school funding. If there is a loss of funding, it would come from more families being able to afford private school tuition with a reduced financial burden due to HB 1532, which in turn would theoretically decrease the number of students enrolled in public schools. A reduction in enrollment would result in fewer per-student payments from the state (but fewer students to serve, which costs less). Therefore, there is a chance public schools could see a reduction in funding, but it would correlate to a reduction in enrollment numbers.

North Dakota State Constitution:

Article VIII

Section 5. All colleges, universities, and other educational institutions, for the support of which lands have been granted to this state, or which are supported by a public tax, shall remain under the absolute and exclusive control of the state. No money raised for the support of the public schools of the state shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school.

For me personally, over 42% of my property tax bill goes to the public school district. Public school funding is generated from not only property taxes, but also through Dept. of Trust Lands funds and royalties and likely other sources. According to Section 5, these funds may not be utilized to fund HB 1532. However, the state generates income in a multitude of other ways. If funds generated through other means are used to fund HB 1532, and are not taken from public school tax collections, there should not be any conflicts with the State Constitution when passing HB 1532.

Many states have implemented school choice funding, especially in the last 5 years, where as much as 100% of the per-student payment is directed to the school of their choice. This bill is proposing far less than 100% (15-30% of the per-student payment, to be exact). The fantastic fiscal position of the state makes now the perfect time to act in the best interest of all students and families of North Dakota and follow the national lead in boosting school choice.

I request full consideration for this bill, or any amendments to empower parents to choose the best educational path for their children. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted by Nate Harling – concerned parent, taxpayer, and voter.