

HB 1532 Testimony
Senate Education Committee
Gerald Vetter, President, Light of Christ Catholic Schools
March 14, 2023

Chairman Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 1532.

My name is Gerald Vetter and I serve as the president of Light of Christ Catholic Schools in Bismarck. Our five schools educate 1,437 students pre-k through grade 12. Our approximately 850 families are integral partners within this community and are privileged in being the primary teachers of their children. Historically, the St. Mary's Academy and Boarding School was the first Catholic school in this region, dating back to 1878, just five years after the railroad reached the Missouri.

Personally, I am the product of both public and private schools. My parents and dedicated educators instilled within me a great respect and admiration for North Dakota schools, educators and a passion for student learning.

Additionally, I serve as the current president for the North Dakota State Association of Non-public Schools. There are approximately 7,700 non-public students in North Dakota, which is about 7% of all North Dakota student's pre-k through grade 12. Non-public schools in North Dakota are approved by the ND Department of Public Instruction. The superintendent of public instruction must approve all non-public schools offering elementary or secondary education. To be an approved school, each year non-public schools must comply with the annual accountability pieces as required by the Department of Public Instruction.

HB 1532 would offer a welcomed educational reimbursement to our North Dakota families. In covering a modest portion of the actual cost to educate their child this would assist families to attend the school most aligned to their ideological beliefs and ultimately deemed the best fit for each child. Thereby, lessening the challenges that may restrict them and lessening the financial sacrifices being made to attend a non-public school and assuring the right that each child will be receiving a quality education in a North Dakota school.

Speaking on-behalf of the students and families of Light of Christ Catholic Schools, they appreciate calling North Dakota their home. After our students receive their ND approved diplomas, nine of 10 graduates then decide to attend one of our ND private or public colleges or universities. Many during the course of their higher education and beyond regularly seek employment in their state becoming generous citizens, parents and taxpayers helping to support the common good of their local communities and state.

On-behalf of the State Association of Non-Public schools, we are committed to continuous improvement and statutory compliance of all school approval requirements, post-secondary and workforce preparedness, support for social emotional concerns and providing safe and secure school environments. These intentional efforts are implemented with fidelity, while still honoring and preserving a distinctive mission that each institution was founded upon.

HB 1532 is an investment in the families and students of North Dakota. Thank you for your work and service to our state and for your consideration of House Bill 1532. This educational reimbursement program both supports and respects the rights of parents to make informed decisions regarding their child's education and to create greater access to an excellent North Dakota education in covering a modest portion of the cost to educate their children in a North Dakota school deemed the best fit for each child.

There are several intelligent administrators, parents and alumni here today that can expand in greater detail relative to some of the matters I highlighted in my comments.

I am able to stand for questions.