

February 3, 2025
House Education Committee
HB 1540 - Neutral

My name is Renee Heydt and our family lives southwest of Berthold in rural Ward County. As we're all aware, there is no manual for parenting, and when our oldest began preschool seventeen years ago, we quickly discovered that educating our children might not be as simple as we thought. We lived in Dallas at the time, and knew our neighborhood public school would not be an option. My husband was working on a college degree, I was changing diapers and clipping coupons for groceries, and private school was way out of reach. With my degree in education on our office wall, homeschooling became the first step in the education journey for our three children.

Job opportunities brought us to North Dakota a short time later, and within Ward County we've had the privilege of utilizing homeschool, rural public school, and private school options over the last fifteen years. None of these options are perfect. All come with both positives and negatives. We were fortunate to enjoy a very supportive relationship with our local public school and we've known many excellent, hard-working, caring teachers and administrators within our district. We're grateful for their contribution to our children's education, and it was a good fit for our family during that time. We would never advocate to fund school choice by reducing funding for our public schools.

A desire for higher academic rigor, a more structured environment with high expectations, less digital learning, and faith-based curriculum brought us to Our Redeemer's Christian School in Minot four years ago. I've been fortunate to reenter the classroom as a high school English teacher, and a generous employee tuition discount provides the means for us to keep our children in the private school setting.

I'm often asked about our school and how I like teaching there. I love sharing about the hardworking and respectful teenagers I'm fortunate to spend my days with, our supportive administration, caring parents, and our phone-free classrooms! Sadly, these conversations often end with comments like, "We'd really like to send our kids to private school too, but we just can't afford it."

During this legislative session, you have an opportunity to remedy this for families in our communities. I am in support of an education savings account program, but I believe there are issues within HB 1540, as well as the other five bills, that must be addressed. Access to the funds, how they will be disbursed, misuse prevention, explanations of qualifying expenses, and annual testing requirements are some areas that need further attention and clarification. I spent many hours reading, studying, and discussing these six school choice bills. While I see issues with each one, what I **do not** see is public school funding reduced in any way. Some, like 1540, would actually **increase** funding to public schools through the program. Just like home, public, and private education are not perfect, none of these bills are perfect. All have both positives and negatives. I'm in full support of education savings account legislation, and I

implore you to consider each carefully, revise and rework them, and find a sensible, fiscally responsible bill that will provide funds for more North Dakota families to educate their children in the school setting that best meets their needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and thank you for your service to the people of this great state.

Sincerely,

Renee Heydt
Berthold, ND