

**Testimony on
February 5, 2025, 10:00 A.M.
House Education Committee
Representative Heinert, Chairman**

Marya J. Skaare, President, Trinity Catholic Schools

Affirmative Support of HB 1590

Good afternoon, Chairman Heinert and House Education Committee Members,

My name is Marya Skaare. While this is largely a duplicate of my testimony for other education choice-related bills, I would be remiss if I didn't demonstrate my support for all legislation designed to support ND students, and for the legislative body to review all of the proposed legislation and determine the best course of action to achieve the desired outcome for all students. I am the current President of Trinity Catholic Schools in Dickinson and more importantly, I am a mom with my youngest now in her sophomore year of high school, so this bill is of great interest to me and could be of great impact to the families who entrust their children's education to our state's nonpublic schools or those who desire to do so, but haven't had the means to do so. Thank you for the opportunity share my testimony in support of school choice in North Dakota. Just off of National School Choice Week—which has been formally proclaimed in ND for the last eight years—as well as the 49th Annual Catholic Schools Week, the timing of this hearing could not be more providential. I especially appreciate Gov. Armstrong's comment in his School Choice Week proclamation that "citizens across the state of North Dakota agree that improving the quality of education remains a pressing concern for the state's leaders," and "every person deserves and recognizes the role of an effective education and the immeasurable value it adds to their development and growth." This sentiment is evident now more than ever with President Trump's recent executive order aimed at expanding educational freedom and opportunities for families. I am encouraged by the number of proposed bills this session geared toward helping families with education expenses related to their school age children. I stand today in support of HB 1590, but more so, I stand

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in support of the wisdom of our legislative body in North Dakota to work through these bills, finding the right solution for North Dakota's students and their families that will work effectively with anticipated federal legislation. Born, raised and educated in North Dakota, I am a product of our State's strong system of public schools from a small community where, like the majority of North Dakota, there was not a non-public school option available. Even today, less than 7% of school-age students in ND attend a non-public school. Even with the modest number of non-public options, my children have been fortunate enough to attend both public and non-public schools with the latter simply being the right fit for our family, and ultimately, where I would be called to serve in my career. I share this with you today because I simply want to take a moment to reinforce the fact that choice in education is not intended to be an indictment of public schools, just as it should not be used as an indictment of non-public schools. In North Dakota, we have of the most robust oversight of nonpublic schools by the State and I can attest that our schools enjoy a positive working relationship with the state. Choice in education is not about pitting school systems against one another and it is not about a new funding mechanism for private school systems to the detriment of public school systems. In fact, upon reviewing the proposed Bill, I was pleased that it makes very clear that the intent is to expand our State's commitment to student success by implementing an education savings account program for families, empowering them through partnership with the state to make their choice in education attainable. With ESA funds providing freedom and flexibility for families, this school choice legislation is clearly not about State support of school systems, rather it is about State support of STUDENTS--EVERY North Dakota school-age student

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regardless of the type of school with which they affiliate; and as a parent, that is incredibly encouraging and makes me so proud of who we are as North Dakotans. Our willingness to blaze trails, aspire to greatness and always prioritize our people, is exactly why this bill is worthy of a do-pass recommendation.

Chairman Beard and esteemed Senators, please accept my enthusiastic and sincere encouragement for your support for school choice. Your support means support of ND students and their success. Your support means unlocking funds for ND families to choose the educational path that is right for their children. Your support is an investment in our future by investing in our people. Your support begins today, with a do-pass.

Thank you for your many and good works for the State of North Dakota!