

16 March 2025

Senate Education Committee
North Dakota Legislative Council
State Capitol
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Chairman Todd Beard and Senate Education Committee,

My name is Gloria Wolf, and I am a lifelong North Dakota resident. I write to submit testimony in strong opposition to 2025 SB 2400: Education Savings Account Fund, or any bill that suggests diverting public education funds to private schools.

I have an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree all in nursing, and I have practiced medicine as a family nurse practitioner for nearly twenty-five years. I am proud to say that the foundation preceding all three of my advanced degrees was a well-rounded public education in Emmons County. Public school systems like the one I, my spouse, and all five of our children attended continue to function as a critical pathway for families in our beloved state. Any funding diverted from these schools is to the detriment of the many families and communities comprising rural North Dakota.

Private schooling is rarely an option for families outside of North Dakota's largest cities. Instead, in our state's smaller, rural communities, public schools act not only as the communities' backbone, but also as robust and competitive hubs of growth for students and their families. To maintain their operations, these schools rely on public education funding to invest in well-trained educators, support staff, and counselors to address the diverse needs of today's youth. I am grateful to my three immediate family members serving as educators in the public sector, and I am happy all eight of my grandchildren are attending or will soon attend public schools. With family members so intricately tied to the public education sector, I have a window into the needs and happenings in North Dakota's public schools; therefore, I fear any devastating diversions of essential funding caused by 2025 SB 2400 for small communities like mine.

Public taxpayer funds should remain within the public education system. Public schools are designed to serve *all* students regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or financial status. Private schools, however, often cater to wealthier families; diverting funds from public schools via 2025 SB 2400 could exacerbate existing inequalities among social classes and weaken the public education system by reducing available resources. While private schools can recruit or selectively admit students, public schools must be able to serve everyone, which includes creating equal opportunities for students with special needs, for example, or finding ways to

address the burgeoning mental health crisis among American youth. Public schools cannot turn away families and students who come to them with unique needs and therefore should be prioritized in public funding to ensure high quality responsiveness.

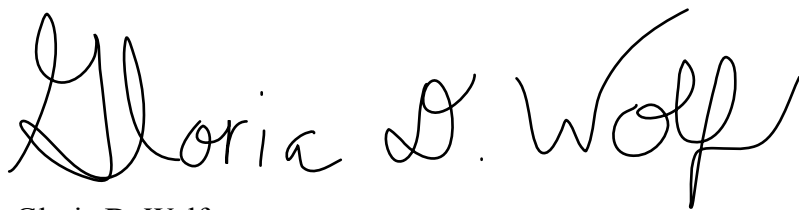
Because private schools are not held to the same standards of transparency, accountability, and accessibility as public schools are, there is no way to guarantee that increased funding to private schools will be used to enhance student education. These funds might instead go to recruit athletically competitive students from surrounding communities, to top off administrators' already-inflated incomes, or to assist with campus beatification—all perks unavailable to many smaller public schools. Until private schools are held to the same standards of financial disclosure, they should not benefit from public education funds.

Given that 2025 SB 2400 originated from legislators representing North Dakota's larger cities, there seems to be a conflict of interest at play, as these legislators look to pass a bill that benefits directly their children, grandchildren, or the children of their high-profile donors at the expense of North Dakota's public-school students. Bills that are not seeking to invest in the welfare of *all* North Dakotan children purport to be about equity but are actually elitist. Alternatively, a more equitable solution for private schools would *not* look to take funds from public schools but instead offer income-based tuition. This change would make private school education more accessible for a greater number of North Dakota families without compromising the resources of public education.

Regardless of the terms used to name these bills, they masquerade as vouchers to fund private schools at the expense of those students in the public education sector. It is a choice to send one's children to private schools, and I am a staunch defender of this choice; however, choosing private education comes at the cost of paying private tuition; this payment should remain the responsibility of those individuals seeking a private school experience. Public funds belong with public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Again, I am strongly opposed to 2025 SB 2400, but I have a stronger faith in North Dakota's elected officials to do the greater good for the greater number of North Dakotans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gloria D. Wolf". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Gloria D. Wolf