

March 17, 2025

To the Members of the Committee:

I am writing as a special education teacher in Des Lacs, North Dakota and as a parent of three children, all of who are currently or have been educated in the public school system. I have worked for over 20 years, most of which has been in a small, public school, with just a couple years in the larger, urban setting of Minot. In both schools, I have seen firsthand the unique challenges our students face. I have spent my career advocating for students with special needs, and it is from this perspective that I strongly oppose the bill currently before you, HB 1540.

This bill, if passed, would have a devastating impact on public education, particularly for students with disabilities. The proposal to divert public funds to private schools—often to pay for private tuition—raises serious concerns. Private schools are not required to meet the same standards of inclusion, transparency, or accountability as public schools. Most private institutions do not have the resources nor the legal obligation to provide the individualized support that students with special needs require. If these schools were mandated to provide the same level of support and accept all students, including those with disabilities, this conversation might be different. But the bill does not address this issue.

For students with disabilities, public schools are often the only place where they can receive the necessary support services, as detailed by their team in the IEP. Diverting funds from public education would significantly limit the resources available to schools, making it even harder to serve these students who already face numerous barriers to learning.

Particularly in the more rural settings, this bill would exacerbate the existing disparities in educational funding. Rural schools often rely more heavily on state funding, and any reduction in that funding would force local districts to either cut services or raise property taxes to cover the gap. This could have a devastating impact on special education programs, which require specialized staff, resources, and funding.

For these reasons, I urge you to reconsider this bill and protect public education for all students, especially those with special needs. Private schools may offer valuable services, but they are not held to the same standards or required to serve all students. Public schools, on the other hand, are required to educate every child, regardless of their background or ability, and should be the priority when it comes to the use of public funds.

Sincerely,

Tracy Bonn
Special Education Strategist
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