

House Political Subdivisions Committee
Chairman Jason Dockter
January 21, 2021

HB 1192

Chairman Dockter and members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee, my name is Mark Vollmer. I proudly serve as Superintendent of Minot Public School District #1 and Minot Air Force Base #160. I stand in front of you today to offer my opposition to HB 1192.

First, let me offer my thanks on behalf of educators throughout our state. The willingness of the State of North Dakota to pay the “Lions share” of educational costs has been a wonderful gift to the students of North Dakota. This generous effort has eased financial challenges at the district level, and undoubtedly, provided district payers with much needed tax relief.

While the current school funding formula is not perfect, it does provide an opportunity for the public to be involved in the financial considerations through the budget hearing process. Ultimately, these local budgetary decisions are made by the school board – a group of peers, duly elected by eligible voters in the school district. They are elected to make local decisions. The amount of tax levied, up to a determined cap, has been left to the authority of the local school board.

A percentage cap on the amount of annual tax levy can cripple a local school district, and place limits on a duly elected board to make local decisions that can impact our students.

Please let me share the story of Minot Public Schools: One could say, we’ve been through it all . . . unprecedented growth from 2008-2012, a devastating flood, a decrease in taxable valuations, and now a pandemic.

From 2008 – 2012, MPS noted drastic increases in student enrollments. In fact, our district has grown from 6,100 students in 2008 to nearly 7,700 students today. From 2008 – 2012, the district saw hundreds of additional students, but never once qualified for rapid enrollment dollars. Since schools are funded on the

previous year's ADM, we were required to increase local tax revenues to pay for the cost of education for hundreds of new students. *This bill would have crippled our school district.*

After the flood and subsequent recovery, we depended on the flexibility of our local tax base to support education as we waded through FEMA rules and requirements. *This bill would have crippled our school district.*

When oil exploration slowed in western North Dakota, we saw a 10% decrease in our taxable valuation followed by an increase in tax levies to offset the loss of valuation and a temporary dip in student enrollment. *This bill would have crippled our school district.*

In Minot, the school board has served as an excellent steward of the tax payers dollars. When needed, they have raised taxes, and when possible, they have lowered taxes . . . like a good school board ought to. They have listened to the people – the very people who have elected them. The very people who can choose to not re-elect them at the voting booth.

As a legislature, you have provided a generous per pupil payment, you have placed a cap on the number of mills that can be levied by a school district, and you have set forth a requirement for patrons to have a voice via the budget hearing process.

Limiting the school board's ability to raise the local levy from the previous year to a patron vote, erodes local control. Our patrons elect our school board members, and entrust them with these important decisions.

I encourage you to let local school boards evaluate their current reality and make decisions for the good of the community, and within existing funding formula perimeters.

Therefore, I encourage a "Do Not Pass" recommendation on HB 1192, I thank you for your time, and will stand for any questions you may have.