

Hello House Education Committee,

My name is Marie Vetter. I live in District 18 and I am a parent who has chosen to enroll my children in St. Michael's Catholic School.

I support HB 1540, but I am also in support of all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support HB 1540.

In voicing my support of HB 1540, I'll be direct: this isn't just about policy—it's about our children and our constitutional rights as parents.

My husband and I are in the midst of raising ten children, all of whom are, of course, unique with varying gifts and struggles. Tim is employed in our community as a public servant; I work three jobs as well as operating my own business. We're not looking for handouts; we're looking for equity in how our education dollars are allocated.

I'll share briefly about our journey. We started in public schools, and I do want to acknowledge the dedicated teachers and staff at those establishments. These educators tried their best, but eventually, we faced a reality that many parents understand: sometimes, even good schools can't meet every child's needs. When we identified specific challenges our children were facing, we made the difficult decision to homeschool. This allowed us to adjust the pace of learning for each child—something that's nearly impossible in a one-size-fits-all system.

Today, just one of our children is homeschooled, and 5 of our children attend Catholic School, where we've finally found the partnership in education we've been seeking. The support our children receive there is exactly what they need. While we have made it work to hold on to this educational experience, there's something that still feels so unjust: we shouldn't have to work multiple jobs just to access an education that works for our children. These are our tax dollars, meant for our children's education, yet we're effectively paying twice—once through taxes and again through tuition.

This isn't about private versus public education. It's about recognizing that parents know their children best and should have the financial freedom to choose the educational environment that will help their children thrive. The Constitution guarantees our right to direct our children's education, but without school choice, this right becomes a privilege only available to those who can afford it.

I'm not asking for a favor, here. Please don't view this as some sort of special request you'll consider granting out of benevolence. It's quite simple; education dollars are for education or they are not, and I'm asking for our legislature to acknowledge that education dollars should follow the child, not the system. When we talk about school choice, we're talking about trusting parents to make informed decisions about their children's futures. We're talking about acknowledging that different children learn differently, and respond better in certain environments over others, and that's okay.

Our family's story—working multiple jobs, making sacrifices, constantly adjusting to meet our children's educational needs—shouldn't be the norm. School choice legislation would mean that families like ours wouldn't have to struggle to pay bills and provide the education their children need.

This isn't just about my family. It's about every North Dakota family who deserves the right to choose the best educational path for their children, regardless of their income level or zip code. The time for school choice in North Dakota isn't just now—it's overdue.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 1540.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and your time on HB 1540.

Respectfully,

Marie Vetter