

To the ND House and Senate Education Committees –

Thanks for your hard work on behalf of North Dakotans.

My name is Carrie Schumacher, and I live with my husband and 8 children in Bismarck; we are on WIC, Medicaid, and SNAP, though my husband teaches full-time at the University of Mary. Our oldest child is 16 – a junior at School of the Holy Family in Mandan – and they progress down in age from there (14, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4 & 2). The 14-year-old takes a couple freshman classes at BHS and plays sports there, but is primarily homeschooled, as are his younger siblings. Our kids love learning at home – in addition to personal attention, they complete their work quickly and efficiently, leaving them time for music lessons, sports, jobs, and relationships – but they also appreciate access to the public and private school systems. Our youngest child has Down's syndrome, which requires extra time and attention, but the older kids have benefited from learning to love her well and to have compassion for folks with disabilities.

All this is to say – our family has a wide range of gifts and abilities, goals and desires, from a 16-year-old who will apply to elite institutions to a 2.5-year-old who cannot yet walk. These various bills that would allow educational funds to be released to families (especially low-income families like ours), would be a huge benefit for those of your constituents who are called and equipped to offer their kids an education that varies from the standard public-school model.

In case you were unaware, there is a group called Braintree Academy that helps homeschool families in several states recoup some of their school tax money in exchange for increased reporting on educational goals (in the case of ND, they allow families to use \$1700/child enrolled)... but I am sure neither of their end game, what their financial benefit is, nor what is done with the information we submit. It may be more efficient to cut out the middle man and access the funds directly from a state account. Other states have already implemented a similar model to what you are considering.

There is an argument that bills like these may divert funds from public schools, but

- (1) as I (possibly incorrectly) understand it, the school tax moneys from homeschooling families do not get forwarded to their local schools, but rather sit in an account, unapplied.
- (2) Because there is limited space at both public schools and private schools, homeschoolers/private schoolers actually help maintain a stasis at the public schools – and there's not likely to be a huge 'run' on private schools if these funds are available, as they have only so many seats.
- (3) Also, because most families who want to homeschool or use private schools have already made the sacrifice, there may not be a huge increase in either population.
- (4) Having these funds available for private schools would further benefit families, as the income would help schools' available scholarship funds go further to help more students.
- (5) Citizens have paid tax dollars for education and would appreciate being able to access them.

Thank you for considering ways to help families like ours attempt to produce the next generation of faithful, compassionate, and wise North Dakotans.

Carrie Schumacher
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