

1 HB 1540 – Relating to Educational Savings Accounts

2 Mandan Public Schools – Dr. Carly Retterath Testimony

3 I am Dr. Carly Retterath, Assistant Superintendent of Mandan Public Schools. I am writing to you
4 today to express my opposition to House Bill 1540, which seeks to establish Educational Savings
5 Accounts (ESAs) for North Dakota students.

6 First, I want to thank this committee for their time and dedication to North Dakota Students and
7 their families. While I support giving families voice and choice in their student's education, I
8 cannot support this bill as it is currently written.

9 First, public money requires public accountability. Our public schools are held to rigorous
10 standards of accountability and transparency. Every dollar spent is tracked and audited to ensure
11 it is used effectively. In contrast, while this bill outlines some accountability for private institutions
12 it does not appear to require public audits or public-school board meetings. Diverting public funds
13 to private schools through ESAs without these safeguards undermines the accountability that
14 taxpayers expect and deserve.

15 In addition, it is often argued that private schools achieve better test scores, but it is essential to
16 recognize that private schools have the luxury of selecting their student body. Currently, there is
17 no provision in the bill that would prohibit private schools from denying students based on
18 academic deficits, behavioral needs or other established criteria. By choosing which students to
19 admit, they can shape their performance metrics, thus creating an uneven playing field when
20 compare to public schools, which are committed to educating every child regardless of
21 background, ability, or socioeconomic status.

22 Furthermore, rural schools are the lifeblood of their communities. They are more than just
23 educational institutions; they are centers of community life and civic engagement. Diverting funds
24 away from these schools to support ESAs will exacerbate the financial strain on already resource-
25 limited rural schools. This policy would not provide any meaningful choice to rural students, as
26 private schools are often not a feasible option due to distance and accessibility.

27 Instead of siphoning funds away from public schools, we should focus on strengthening them.
28 Investment in public education is an investment in the future of our state. Ensuring equitable access

29 to high-quality education for all students, regardless of their geographic location or economic
30 circumstances, should be our top priority.

31 Instead of siphoning funds away from public schools, we should focus on strengthening them. I
32 fully support parents' ability to choose services such as tutoring, counseling, and college
33 coursework to meet their child's needs. However, we need to be cautious about giving money to
34 private institutions without appropriate accountability and at the expense of students that do not
35 have the same opportunities. Investment in public education is an investment in the future of our
36 state. Ensuring equitable access to high-quality education for all students, regardless of their
37 geographic location or economic circumstances, should be our top priority.

38 In conclusion, House Bill 1540 threatens to weaken the very foundation of public education in
39 North Dakota. It diverts critical resources from public schools and lacks the accountability that
40 stewardship of public money demands. I urge you to consider the long-term implications of this
41 bill and to stand against it in support of our public education system.

42 Thank you for your time and consideration.