

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1540

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Daniel Martinez. My wife, who could not be here today, and I are United States Air Force Veterans and parents to eight beautiful children.

I am here to testify in support of House Bill 1540 and respectfully request that you render a “DO PASS” on this bill.

We feel very strongly about the ability to choose an education for our children that best suits them and firmly believe that we as parents, are *the* most qualified to make that decision. Furthermore, my wife and I believe that the manner in which their education is funded is a matter of justice and parental rights. On the matter of justice, it is the duty of our government to justly and fairly distribute both public benefits and burdens to *all* its citizens. It is not just that we simultaneously help fund a public school system for which our children will not benefit from, while also paying tuition to the school that is actually educating them. On the matter of parental rights, it is our duty as parents to guide and direct the education of our children. The path that we have chosen for our own kids is directly in line with our religious and educational beliefs. Our right to choose the foundation upon which their futures are built should not rest on whether I need to seek out additional employment or empty our savings account year after year. This is why a bill such as this is needed.

I stated previously that my wife and I are raising eight children. Our five school-aged kids are enrolled in Bishop Ryan Catholic School. Over the last 12 years, three of them have attended six different schools across four different states, both public and private. We know without a doubt that they thrive in Catholic schools. Although it has been a heavy financial burden, we feel it is the best choice for them. Unfortunately, after this school year is over we may be faced with a very difficult decision: Who do we pull out of Bishop Ryan? Our kindergartener who comes home excited to tell us that she loves Jesus and can't wait to see him one day? Our 2nd grader who can recite his prayers in Latin and tells us about the beauty of First Holy Communion and Reconciliation? Or will it be our 7th grader who is autistic and ADHD and struggles every day, but finds solace in the wonderful teachers and staff that go above and beyond to make sure that their lessons reach him in a way that he can understand? Or will it be my Junior or Sophomore girls who excel in their academics, but more importantly have expressed a calling to serve God and their community which is a direct influence by the culture of giving that Bishop Ryan has instilled in them. I don't have an answer today.

I would like to comment on just one more thing: My wife and I have been together for almost 25 years; she is from Minnesota and I am from Arizona. In 25 years the closest we've been to either of our families is an 8-hour drive. We have missed countless birthdays, weddings, holidays, and funerals. We've talked about where we would call home when she retired from the Air Force for over two decades, and I have to say that Minot, ND was never on the list. We dreamt of being close to family, hers or mine, it didn't matter as long as we were close. Bishop Ryan Catholic School has changed all of that. My wife retired last month, we bought a house in Minot and have decided that

the great state of North Dakota is our home. Bishop Ryan is the reason we stayed. If a school like that can completely alter our 20-year old plans and have such an immense impact on the direction of an entire family, please consider how many more families could be helped if they too had the means to send their kids to a school of their choice.

Thank you all for your time.