

To: Senate Education Committee Members

From: Scott R. Jensen

Senior Advisor to the American Federation for Children

Re: Support for HB 1540

Date: February 4, 2025

On behalf of the American Federation for Children, the nation's largest school choice organization, I would like to express our support for HB 1540 which would create an Education Savings Account program in North Dakota.

As all parents and teachers know, even children in the same family can have very different learning styles. That is why we believe the children of North Dakota deserve a wide variety of publicly funded educational opportunities. Unfortunately, North Dakota is one of three states without public charter schools or private school choice.

HB 1540 is a well-designed bill that includes a number of strong features that would ensure its success. The legislation incorporates features drawn from national model legislation that are tailored to meet the needs of students in North Dakota. I would like to highlight three of these features: 1) the bill provides parents with a robust ESA amount and a broad menu of approved items from which they may customize their child's education to meet their needs; 2) the bill includes strong academic and financial accountability measures including the requirement that participants take either the state test or a nationally norm-referenced exam; and 3) the bill contains protections for the autonomy of private schools and parents to direct the education of their students.

I would also like to note that the fiscal analysis of this bill makes an assumption that does not reflect the experiences of other states with private school choice programs. The fiscal analysis assumes that 100% of the eligible students presently in private schools or home schools will take advantage of the ESA program in Year 1. This has never happened in the 35 year history of the modern school choice movement – not even close. If the Committee members or other legislators would like information on the actual take up rates for existing private school students and home school students, we would be happy to provide that information from states where it is available.

The children of North Dakota should be given the choices available to students in majority of states in the union. Please pass HB 1540.