

Hello Mr. Chairman and House Education Committee,

My name is Kimberley Winfield. I live in District 8 and I am a parent who has chosen to enroll my children at Shiloh Christian School.

I support House Bill No 1540, and all school choice bills that support parent autonomy and the right to provide an education for my child. I support House Bill No 1540 because private school education has shaped my life and is shaping my children's lives even though sacrifices have had to be made to ensure that this education was and is possible.

Thirty five years ago my younger brother and I were enrolled as new students at Shiloh Christian School. That same year my mother was completely blindsided when my dad filed for divorce and left our family. She knew without a shadow of a doubt that my brother and I needed to remain at Shiloh because it was not only our school, but it had become our village. And as you know, it takes a village to raise a child.

Shiloh provided my brother and I with stability, and an outstanding education. More importantly Shiloh provided us with a community that circled around our family, nurturing us and strengthening our faith along the way.

My mother went from being our stay at home mom to working two jobs and doing random odd jobs to ensure we could go to Shiloh. And she still had to humbly accept help from her mom who also decided to pick up extra work to help pay for our tuition. Instead of becoming statistics from a broken home, both my brother and I went on to become first generation college graduates. I also have a Master's Degree in Education, and am almost done with my doctoral degree as well. I'd like to add that I completed an entire semester of college credits taking CLEP tests and I see that this Bill also supports using funds for that!

After College my husband and I spent the first 16 years of our married life in Atlanta, Georgia. We love Atlanta! However, we moved back to Bismarck in 2021 so that our children could have a better quality of life, which for us meant that they would be able to grow up with their cousins and attend Shiloh Christian School. We enrolled the kids in 2021 and we currently have an 8th grader, 6th grader, and 3rd grader at Shiloh.

Just like it did for my brother and I, Shiloh provides our children with a supportive community that not only nurtures their faith and academic development, but also provides them with a village that is committed to supporting them and even me. My husband is a millwright, so he travels for months on end for powerstation turnarounds. I am so thankful for the support of my parents, family, and my Shiloh family when he is gone. One of the things I love most about being able to choose where my kids go to school is that it creates opportunities for families to educate their children together. My brother, brother-in-law, first cousin, and I all send our 12 kids to Shiloh. We actually all live in completely different areas of Bismarck, Mandan which means that our children would not have the opportunity to go to school and grow up together on an everyday basis if they did not attend Shiloh.

There are families at Shiloh who do not feel a tremendous amount of burden by the tuition there. Yet there are many more who do. We fall into that category. We have to keep a tight budget that doesn't include things like going to the movies, or out to eat, or taking vacations. We drive old cars so that we don't have car payments and we are as frugal as possible in every area.

I currently teach at Shiloh which helps us because there is a tuition discount for staff. I also teach summer school for BPS to supplement my income and stay abreast of what's happening in the school system. However, I still have to work a second job waitressing at Wings and Rings to help make sure we can keep our kids at Shiloh. We definitely feel the stress of finances on a regular basis. If we had a child that needed extra tutoring services I don't even know where we would come up with the funds, but I see that House Bill 1540 could even be used to help with that.

House Bill 1540 would be a real blessing to our family and others like us because it would help eliminate some of the stress we experience by providing funds to help with tuition, while we provide our kids with the educational experience that is best for them. It's vital that parents have school choice options so that they can do what is best for their child. My best friend's 12 year old son died from MD two weeks ago. She was able to provide him with the best possible quality of life by doing online virtual school with him.

In the past, I worked for Ashworth College and James Madison High School, which are affiliated private online schools. We served so many students that were not successful in public school, but found success and earned a high school diploma doing online school. Many of our students weren't successful in public school simply because of who they were. They were pegged as different or odd and bullied by their peers because of it. These same students had amazing gifts and talents that they went on to pursue and share with the world after earning their high school diploma and or degree online.

As a result of my personal experiences with private education, I urge you to vote in favor of house Bill 1540.