

To Whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB 1607, which is currently under consideration by the committee. As a concerned life-long resident and teacher in North Dakota and a firm believer in the strength of our public education system, I urge you to recommend a DO NOT PASS on this legislation. I am a product of K-12 public education from a Class B town in western North Dakota, a product of the University of North Dakota, and now a teacher in a city in eastern North Dakota. The legislation in question seeks to divert crucial funds from public schools by implementing a voucher system.

My first concern is the limited access to private schools. As I said before, I am from a Class B school in western North Dakota. The closest private school was almost an hour drive. Only 32% of North Dakotan families have access to private schools, meaning that the majority of our residents would not benefit from the proposed voucher system. By diverting public funds to private institutions, we would be disproportionately benefiting a small segment of the population while leaving the vast majority of North Dakota families without equal opportunities.

There are also inequities in homeschooling vs public schooling. Our public schools have state standards that all public schools must follow. Homeschooling doesn't have the same standards public schooling currently institutes, and even with the proposed changes massive inequities will still exist. By diverting funds to homeschooling, we are financially hindering our public dollars to support students who aren't involved in the public process.

Our public schools already face financial challenges that haven't been met yet. Schools are underfunded, overcrowded, and do not have enough resources to go around. Public money should be going to the public buildings to fully-fund the opportunities for the students. A voucher system is not beneficial for the crisis that already exists.

The public schools in North Dakota are integral to our future leaders and future work force. If public money is diverted to private institutions, then the students suffer. Remember, there are 78% of students who do not have access to a private institution. Private institutions are also not held to the same standards as public schools. The rural – urban divide will widen. The educational crisis will become worse.

I respectfully urge you to reject the proposal of school vouchers in North Dakota in all of its iterations. Public dollars must be protected and stay in the public sector.

Thank you for your time,

Erika Feole