

Testimony in Opposition to 1607

Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee,

My name is Leslie Bieber and I am the Superintendent of Alexander Public School. I am in opposition to HB1607.

Public funds in every public entity require the same transparency and accountability measures that public schools must follow. Public schools are legally bound by open records laws, ensuring that every dollar spent is accounted for and that financial decisions are made with public oversight. I request the same for every tax dollar that will go towards any private tuition or fees.

Redirecting ESA Funds for Universal School Meals

If the Legislature is committed to ensuring all students benefit from state funding, a more effective and equitable use of these funds would be to guarantee free breakfast and lunch for every student in North Dakota. No matter where a child receives their education—public, private, or home school—all children need access to nutritious meals to thrive. By redirecting ESA funds to universal school meals, North Dakota can:

- **Combine multiple bills**—including the bill proposed to support school meal debt relief, the free meals bill, and various ESA proposals—into a single, comprehensive policy.
- **Save the state money** by eliminating duplicative funding mechanisms and ensuring funds are used efficiently.
- **Support every student** in North Dakota, regardless of where they receive their education.

Providing universal school meals would:

- **Ensure no child in North Dakota goes hungry during the school day.**
- **Support families by alleviating the financial burden of meal costs.**
- **Improve student focus, behavior, and academic outcomes.**

Using ESA funds to cover the cost of school meals benefits every student by still supporting their education choice.

HB1607 undermines the principles of public education by diverting taxpayer dollars to schools that are not subject to the same public accountability. Rather than creating an inequitable funding I urge a do not pass on this bill but rather redirect these funds toward a universal meal program that serves **every** child in North Dakota, regardless of where they receive their education.

I respectfully ask this committee to oppose HB1607. Thank you for your time and consideration.