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ND Legislature  
69<sup>th</sup> Assembly

RE: HB 1607 - No

I am writing in opposition of HB 1607 and the establishment of educational empowerment accounts. state aid payments for public schools, nonpublic schools and students receiving home education.

First, this bill is unclear as to whether or not home educators are eligible for the funds proposed. This makes me nervous because many others will also be confused. I am a home educator and as the president of the biggest support group in the state, I can tell you that a vast majority of homeschoolers do not want public funding because it brings additional regulation. I appreciate the attempt of the bill sponsors to separate home education from those receiving funds in this bill, but I wish it were more clear that because one cannot file a statement of intent (SOI) to homeschool or must withdraw their SOI then they are not homeschooling and receiving this money.

Second, funding private schools with public money does not make the money private; it makes the private schools public. Former US Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, said in 2019 “if it's public dollars, it's public education.”

Third, this bill does not provide school choice. Parents already have the ability to choose public, private or home education. Hopefully, ND will add charter schools and micro schools to the list both of which actually add choices to the list. In states with ESAs, empowerment accounts, “money follows the student,” and vouchers, that money is used mostly by those families who are already enrolled in private school. The percentage is well over 60% and in some cases, even over 75%.

Fourth, two wrongs don't make a right. The case has been made that because of the Yellowstone School District and its agreement with TechTrep/Braintree Academy which pays families thousands of dollars to enroll virtually and participate in school-at-home that the state should then also fund private schools equally. What is happening in the Yellowstone School District is certainly wrong and could even be a violation of 15.1-07-25.4.

I will say that I love lines 24 through 28 on page 4 which expressly does not authorize any additional control or supervision over non-public schools and students. If there had been more clarity on the home education portion, I may have even been swayed to a neutral position, though I am more in favor of tax credits, tax reductions and actual school choice options like charter schools and micro schools.

For these reasons, I encourage a “do not pass” on this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Kristy Rose