

Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Kimberly Hurst and I reside in District 1. I am asking that you please render a do pass on Senate Bill 2104.

A strong and sound framework for public instruction is paramount for academic achievement; and state laws are the vital component of that framework. It should go without saying that state laws are critical for ensuring our education system operates effectively, fairly and in uniform. Without establishing compliance of these laws it weakens the quality of education our students receive. Compliance reinforces accountability and transparency to the public, educators and students; which also fosters trust with our education system.

Two years ago I removed my children from North Dakota public instruction. There are a number of reasons why, one of which are the provisions of this bill, or the lack thereof. When my children were enrolled in public school I had experienced numerous times how ineffective the complaint process is. At no point was my voice heard, nor was there resolution to any of my complaints. This made it challenging to navigate my involvement with my children's education. I was given instructions to follow a 'chain of command' policy at my local school district, this process would initiate a dodge and deflect response with every chain link I climbed. Multiple times I have called [ND] DPI to speak to higher leadership, but these attempts also resulted in no resolution. I quickly discovered there is a serious lack of accountability in our education system, particularly concerning

the absence of a formal complaint and investigation process. This raises an important question for consideration: What is the purpose of state law if there are no mechanisms to ensure accountability or consequences for violations?

The last time I checked, there are a total of 5,009 students who are currently homeschooling in North Dakota. According to DPI's public data, this is a 28.8% increase from the 2022-2023 school year. There has been consistent growth in the homeschool community for the last three years in the entire state of North Dakota. In my local school district alone, Williston Basin School District#7, there has been a 129.9% growth in homeschool students in the last 4 years, resulting in a current total of 545 homeschool children. After becoming a member in the homeschool community and forming relationships with other homeschool families, there seems to be a pattern for the reasons more families are choosing homeschooling over public education; many of these reasons are again, in relation to the provisions of this bill.

The current education laws provide no support for parents or the public to file a formal complaint prompting a bona fide investigation into the complaint. The foundation of compliance with any law written would be powerless and ineffective without consequence, therefore the financial accountability attached to this bill delivers a solid foundation of adherence to the laws. In contrast to any argument against the financial component of this bill, I would like to bring attention that it will not be of any concern as long as the school districts obey the laws of North Dakota; it's just that simple.

In response to previous opposition, this bill clearly defines the formal complaint process. Specifically, a complaint must demonstrate and substantiate a clear violation of North Dakota state law. The complaint process is not intended for general or unrelated concerns; it is specifically designed to address violations of state law. Complaints falling outside these parameters would not be subject to investigation. Anyone opposing school districts complying with state law raises questions about the underlying intentions. Compliance with state law should not be optional for North Dakota residents, so it stands to reason that it should not be optional for local government entities either.

Looking at the homeschool data, it is irrefutable and it distinctly shows there is a mandate for change in the North Dakota public education system. This change starts with accountability and accountability cannot happen without compliance with consequence. I am a strong advocate for this bill because it implements effective obedience to the education laws of North Dakota that will fundamentally strengthen our framework for academic excellence. I urge you to support the passing of Senate Bill 2104. Thank you for your consideration on this important matter and for your service to the state of North Dakota. I stand for questions.

Kimberly Hurst