



**Testimony of
Jennifer Feist, Director of Development
Valley City-Barnes County Development Corporation
Valley City, ND**

SB 2400 (In Opposition)

Representative Pat D. Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee

I have served as the Director of Development for Valley City-Barnes County for nearly 38 years. I am keenly aware of the workforce challenges, the importance of quality education and the impact to business and community growth across the State of North Dakota.

I am in opposition to SB 2400 (Re-engrossed) that establishes an education savings account program for several reasons.

- 1) The \$22.8 Million in 2026-2027 plus \$3 Million for administration should be/must be invested in the public school system that serves over 118,000 public school students.
 - a. Our public schools have served the State of North Dakota incredibly well for decades. Valley City Public School was rated the highest in the State in Choice Ready in 2024.
 - b. In a press release dated January 29, 2025, Superintendent Kirsten Baesler stated that North Dakota students outperformed national averages in mathematics in the newest results for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP). In fourth-grade mathematics, five states had higher average scores than North Dakota and six states had higher average scores in eighth-grade math.
- 2) SB 2400 (Re-engrossed) is problematic and far more costly.
 - a. Funds are granted to students until the student graduates high school or reaches twenty-one years of age, regardless of household income. An eligible use of funds is tuition and fees at an eligible postsecondary institution.
 - b. Are we providing the same opportunity for students in public schools?
- 3) SB 2400 (Re-engrossed) Governance
 - a. The bill calls for the Superintendent of Public Instruction to administer the Program or contract with a third-party entity to administer and audit the Program.
 - b. Are we setting up a new agency and related operating costs?
 - c. How and who will be policing, monitoring, and enforcing the provisions of this bill and at what cost?
 - d. The Superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction may not regulate the educational program of a participating school (nonpublic) or education service provider that accepts funds from an education savings account. The creation of the education savings account program does not expand the regulatory authority of the

state, its officers, or a school district beyond the regulations necessary to enforce the requirements of the education savings account program.

- e. Where is the accountability to the citizens of North Dakota for this Program?
- f. A multimedia marketing program is included. Who and how will the marketing campaign be executed and at what cost? Are we providing the same opportunity and funding to public schools?

North Dakota's public schools must be our priority. Funds must be invested in school buildings, equipment, curriculum, Career Centers, wages, additional innovation, STEM, and more to meet the needs of students and employers. This is critical.

We raise our children to be accountable. SB 2400 (Re-engrossed) utilizes \$22.8 Million plus \$3 Million in marketing funds with no accountability. Our public schools have served the State of North Dakota with remarkable success and have earned investment by the State of North Dakota. I urge a no vote on SB 2400 (Re-engrossed). Thank you.