

FORT RANSOM SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 6

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Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 2400

Chairman, Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 2400, the Education Savings Account (ESA) program. As a long-time educator and school administrator in rural North Dakota, I believe this bill will significantly undermine public education in our state, including the Fort Ransom School District.

Fort Ransom School District currently serves K-6 students in a small, rural community. Our nearest private school is over 40 miles away and is limited to Catholic education for elementary students, while the next closest private schools are more than 80 miles away. Given that we are a K-6 school and private options are not feasible for our students, Fort Ransom is the primary educational institution for our children. We rely heavily on state and federal funding, as well as local tax dollars, to provide the essential services our students need.

SB 2400 would divert public funds to private schools through the ESA program, reducing the already limited resources available to public schools like ours. As a small district, we are particularly vulnerable to such reductions in funding, which would negatively impact our ability to offer specialized services such as special education, extracurricular activities, and academic support. In fact, we partner with Lisbon Public Schools for services like special education, 7-12 education, and transportation through our cooperative agreement. Any reduction in public school funding will make it increasingly difficult to sustain these valuable partnerships.

Moreover, the bill's delayed implementation does not give rural districts like ours adequate time to plan for or adjust to the loss of funding. It is critical that we focus on policies that strengthen and support public schools, ensuring that every student, regardless of their family's income or location, has access to a high-quality education.

I urge you to reconsider this approach and focus on policies that reinforce our public education system, rather than diverting essential funds to private alternatives that do not serve the needs of our rural students.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I urge the committee to vote against SB 2400.

Sincerely,

Dr. Steven L. Johnson

Superintendent, Fort Ransom School District #6