

Submitted to the North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Dr. Nick Klemisch, and I serve as the Superintendent of Garrison Public Schools. I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill No. 2400, which seeks to establish an education savings account (ESA) program that would divert public funds to private education, further eroding the financial stability of our public school system—especially in rural communities like mine.

Public education is the bedrock of our democracy, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, location, or income, has access to a quality education. This bill threatens that foundation by redirecting taxpayer dollars away from public schools—schools that educate all children, not just a select few.

The Negative Impact on Public School Funding

Senate Bill No. 2400 proposes an appropriation of \$3 million from the general fund to support education savings accounts. This reallocation of funding diminishes the resources available to our public schools, directly impacting classroom instruction, teacher salaries, special education services, and essential student programs.

For rural schools like those in Garrison and across North Dakota, every dollar matters. Unlike larger districts that may have a more diverse tax base, rural schools operate with limited financial flexibility. Our budgets are already stretched thin, and further reductions in state funding will lead to larger class sizes, fewer extracurricular activities, and reduced support services—ultimately harming the very students we are entrusted to educate.

Public Schools Serve All, While ESAs Serve a Few

Public schools are required to serve all students, including those with disabilities, those learning English, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Private institutions and home education programs, which stand to benefit from this ESA program, do not have the same obligation. Many private schools are selective in their admissions, meaning public dollars could subsidize institutions that are not open to all children.

Furthermore, there is little accountability to ensure that ESA funds are spent effectively or in ways that truly benefit student learning. Unlike public schools, which must adhere to rigorous academic and financial transparency standards, private schools and home-education programs operate with minimal oversight.

A Better Investment: Strengthening Public Schools

Rather than diverting funding to private entities, we should be investing in strengthening our public education system to ensure every child in North Dakota has access to high-quality instruction, updated technology, and the support needed to thrive in an increasingly competitive world.

Instead of passing Senate Bill No. 2400, I urge this committee to consider initiatives that provide direct support to public schools, such as increased funding for teacher recruitment and retention,

expanded mental health resources, and enhanced career and technical education programs that prepare students for future success.

Conclusion

Senate Bill No. 2400 is not just a financial shift—it is a fundamental departure from our commitment to public education. It takes limited taxpayer dollars away from the very institutions that educate the majority of our children and distributes them to a system with less oversight, less accountability, and fewer requirements to serve all students.

For the sake of our students, our communities, and the future of North Dakota, I strongly urge this committee to oppose this legislation. Our public schools need support, not funding cuts disguised as school choice.

Thank you for your time and consideration.