

Testimony Opposing North Dakota Senate Bill 2400

3/17/25

North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Dear Chairman and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Katie Burington and I am a parent with children in North Dakota's public school system. **I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 2400**, which proposes allocating public funds to private schools. This bill threatens the integrity and effectiveness of our public education system.

Impact on Public School Funding and Resources

North Dakota invests an average of \$15,140 per public school student annually. Diverting public funds to private institutions would reduce the resources available to public schools, hindering their ability to provide quality education. Given that public schools serve approximately 93% of North Dakota's children, such a reallocation could have widespread negative effects.

With less funding, public schools may face larger class sizes, fewer teachers, and reduced support services for students, making it harder to provide individualized instruction. Schools could be forced to cut programs like arts, music, and extracurricular activities, which play a crucial role in student development. Special education services—already expensive to maintain—could suffer, leaving students with disabilities without the support they need. Additionally, North Dakota is already experiencing teacher shortages, and diverting resources away from public schools would make it even more difficult to attract and retain qualified educators. If public schools continue to lose funding, local governments may need to raise property taxes to compensate, placing an additional financial burden on families.

Public schools are the foundation of our communities, and weakening them by siphoning funds to private institutions will only increase inequality and limit opportunities for the vast majority of students.

Exacerbation of Teacher Shortages

North Dakota is already struggling with teacher shortages, with many educators overworked and underpaid. Instead of investing in better salaries, professional development, and classroom resources, SB 2400 would pull money from public schools, making it even harder to recruit and retain quality teachers. If we truly value education in our state, we should be focusing on strengthening the teaching profession—not diverting funds to private institutions that are not accountable to the public.

Neglect of Special Education Services

Public schools are legally required to provide services for students with disabilities, ensuring equitable access to education. In contrast, private schools are not held to the same standards and may not offer necessary support for special education students. This means that students with higher needs will be left with fewer resources, as the funding that supports their services is siphoned off to institutions that do not serve them. This is not only unfair, but it directly harms some of our most vulnerable children.

Widening Socioeconomic Disparities

Private schools have selective admissions and additional costs, making them less accessible to low-income families. Even with state support, tuition and other fees still create financial barriers. Using public funds to subsidize these institutions would widen the gap between affluent and disadvantaged students, contradicting the principle of equal educational opportunity. Instead of prioritizing a small percentage of families who can afford private education, we should be ensuring that every child—regardless of background or income—has access to a strong, well-funded public school.

Conclusion

Senate Bill 2400 is not about expanding opportunity—it is about taking public money and redirecting it toward private interests at the expense of the vast majority of students. Our state should be focused on strengthening public schools, addressing teacher shortages, and ensuring that every child receives a high-quality education, no matter their zip code or economic background. **I urge you to reject SB 2400** and commit to investing in the future of North Dakota's public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Katie Burington