

House Education Committee

Senate Bill 2400 – March 18, 2025

My name is Donene Feist and I am the Director for Family Voices of North Dakota (FVND), Inc. I want to provide to you today testimony on SB 2400.

Family Voices of ND provides educational, informational, and peer support to families of children with special health care needs, medically complex or have a disability. For many years, a vital partner for us as an organization is the Department of Health and Human Services, specifically SHS. Family Voices of North Dakota is statewide family to family health information and education center who serves families of children with special health care needs in ND. Each state in the country and our territories has one family organization that has been designated as a family to family health information and education center. We are that entity for ND.

National prevalence data estimates from the National Survey obtained through the Data Resource Center indicate there is an estimated 39,467 children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN) in ND. One in five families in North Dakota (ND) has a child with special health care needs. Many of those children receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504.

WE are very concerned that s it will divert public funding from North Dakota public schools to fund private schools and homeschooling. If this bill passes it will impact the education of all public-school students with greater impact on students with disabilities and their special and general education teachers. Public dollars should be used to strengthen North Dakota's public schools, which are for all students including those with disabilities, not for subsidizing private schools and homeschooling that serves only a few.

Should funding be diverted to private schools and homeschooling it will impede the infrastructure of public schools. Cause a bigger divide with Rural and Urban schools. We do not feel that this bill is enough for the many children and youth who may need services such as: instructional aide, accommodations and individual skill training.

Rural areas will not have the luxury of having private schools nearby. Their funds would become less and less. SB 2400 would take funds away from our public schools to support private education, but the majority of families in our rural areas won't even have access to these alternatives.

Additionally, services in private schools are lacking for our children with a disability. They do not have to provide services to them. We also do not know what will happen at the federal level with the Department of Education as well as the funding. Who then would have oversight to assure that our children with disabilities will receive adequate supports needed to thrive?

Our state has a long-standing commitment to public education, and it is crucial that we maintain that commitment by ensuring that public funds are used exclusively to support our public schools.

Please vote no on SB2400.

Donene Feist
Family Voices of ND Executive Director
PO Box 163
Edgeley ND 58433
fvnd@drtel.net
701-493-2634

