

Respectfully Submitted by Megan Gilje, M.Ed. – Grade 4 Teacher, Rolette Public School District

Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

I have been a public school educator for 21 years, including 5 years in Bismarck and 16 years in rural school districts. Despite the distinct differences between Class A and Class B schools, one common thread unites every North Dakota public school educator: a passion for our work and an unwavering commitment to the young people we teach.

For those of us teaching in rural school districts, we have to do all this with less. The challenges rural schools face is manifold in comparison to larger public schools:

- Limited resources for technology, materials, and specialized services.
- Difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified teachers due to lower salaries and fewer professional development opportunities.
- Inadequate transportation funding results in longer bus rides for students.
- Due to limited funding and smaller budgets, a lack of access to extracurricular and enrichment activities, as well as college advanced placement and dual credit.
- Shrinking rural tax bases.

Rural schools depend more on state funding than larger schools. However, over the years, state funding for rural school districts has consistently fallen short. If House Bill 2400 is enacted, this issue will worsen significantly, as up to \$60 million will be redirected from our already underfunded education system.

In North Dakota, 93% of students are enrolled in public education, with many lacking the opportunity for private schooling. Why should my public tax dollars subsidize an education savings account for parents who decide to homeschool or send their children to a private school?

Even more importantly, why is the state government prioritizing private and homeschooling for a select few at the expense of public education for over 90 percent of its children?

The reason is simple. HB 2400 is a calculated effort backed by national organizations to undermine public education across the United States. Disguised as a ‘personal choice,’ it redirects funds from public education to private schools through an educational savings account.

If enacted, HB 2400 will have wide-ranging consequences for all public schools. The impact will be especially and unfairly felt in rural school districts with even fewer resources.

Public education is the greatest American achievement. It cultivates a skilled workforce and bolsters the middle class. In rural towns, public schools serve as the heart of the community. HB 2400 would deal a severe blow to rural schools by diverting public funds away from an already underfunded public education system.

I urge you to vote NO on HB 2400.

Sincerely,

Megan Gilje, M. Ed.  
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