

Dear Chairman and committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2400, an Act to create and enact a new chapter to Title 15.1 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the establishment of the Education Savings Account (ESA) program, and to provide both a continuing appropriation and an appropriation.

I support SB 2400 because it places North Dakota families at the center of their children's education. Parents are best positioned to understand their child's unique learning needs, and this bill empowers them with the flexibility to choose the environment that best supports their child's academic and personal success.

My husband and I have prayerfully chosen to send our three children to the John Paul II Schools in Fargo. In this Catholic environment — one that reflects our family's values and beliefs — our children are thriving both academically and spiritually. We are grateful for the ability to make this choice for our family. At the same time, we recognize that not all families have the financial means to make such decisions, even when they know what is best for their children.

We deeply respect and support the public school system and know it serves most learners well. However, we also know families who would choose a different educational setting if they could afford to do so. We have made financial sacrifices to provide this education for our children, and we will continue to pay our share toward initiatives such as the recently passed West Fargo Public School referendum — because we believe in supporting education for all. Now, we are asking for your support in return.

SB 2400 is not about rejecting public education; it is about complementing and strengthening the entire educational landscape in North Dakota. When parents are given options, all sectors of education — public, private, and alternative — are encouraged to improve and better meet the diverse needs of the children they serve.

North Dakota's investment in education should be as diverse and dynamic as the students who call this state home. I urge this committee and the full Senate to pass SB 2400 and give North Dakota families the flexibility, choice, and opportunity to help every child reach their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Shantelle Smith