

March 18, 2025

Chairman Heinert and House Education Committee Members,

My name is Erin Oban, and I am here to express my personal opposition to SB 2400 as informed now by a bunch of different experiences and perspectives, some of which I want to share with you today.

- I grew up as a Class B kid in a small, rural town, where I attended the same K-12 school in the same building (and even with one or two of the same teachers) as my parents.
- After graduating from high school, I attended one of our state's public universities for one semester and then transferred to a private university where I graduated.
- Just before graduating with a teaching degree, I completed my student teaching requirements at Marmot School, known as the Youth Correctional Center (YCC). After receiving my degree, I continued to serve as a substitute teacher at YCC before getting my first full-time teaching job as a junior high math and technology teacher at a parochial school here in Bismarck. Later, I worked as the Director of Community Engagement for one of our state's regional education associations, which helped 57 public and non-public school districts to meet the needs of their students and staff.
- In 2014, I was elected to the State Senate, representing District 35 in central Bismarck where, for 4 legislative sessions, I sat on the Education Committee and debated these very issues.
- After almost 8 years in the Senate, in 2022, I was appointed to serve as the State Director of USDA Rural Development, a federal agency that made more than 70 programs available to provide loans, loan guarantees, and grants available to our country's rural communities and residents and to the cooperatives and organizations that serve rural people and places. I learned a great deal about the unique needs and challenges that rural and Tribal areas experience in terms of accessing capital, building out infrastructure, and scaling and delivering services that provide the quality of life that we all deserve, no matter our zip code.
- And lastly, for 8.5 years, I've been a mom to a now 2nd grader who has benefited tremendously from the village of family, friends, childcare providers, and private preschool and public elementary school teachers who have helped my husband and me with our best job and most important responsibility – being parents to him.

I'm a product of public and private schools. I've taught and been a substitute teacher in private, public, and state-run schools. I've lived in, worked for, and represented some of our smallest, rural communities and one of our state's largest. In every one of those scenarios, there were great, good, average, not so great, and even a couple pretty terrible teachers, leaders, kids, and parents. In some, resources and opportunities and supports were scarce and limited. In others, they were

plentiful. Some of the outcomes were incredible. Some of them, not so much. There are countless factors that contribute to those realities, but there is also big, important difference between selecting those you want to serve and accept all those who need to be served.

I share these perspectives and experiences because they've all helped shape my opinion on bills like SB 2400, even as creative and well-intentioned and thoughtfully drafted as it is.

Just as I have through my own educational path and now in guiding our child's, I wholly support school choice to the extent we're able to provide it. I've always supported families who, for whatever their reasons, choose public, private, parochial, or homeschool education for their children. What I do not support is our government and its taxpayers picking up the tab for people who choose not to use the publicly funded option. And honestly, and especially after serving in the legislature myself, I'm very much surprised by how many legislators seem to believe that it is somehow the government's responsibility to create and fund an entitlement program to subsidize the personal responsibilities and individual choices of others, because, when you cut right down to it, that's what a voucher program is and does, and it's what passage of this bill would create.

My family doesn't believe the government owes us anything, claim that we're saving the government money, or expect the government to pay for our private vehicle if we choose not to use the public transportation system.

My family doesn't believe the government owes us anything, claim that we're saving the government money, or expect the government to pay for our backyard swingset or a pool or private golf club membership if we choose not to use public parks, pools, and golf courses.

My family doesn't believe the government owes us anything, claim that we're saving the government money, or expect the government to pay for us to hire private security or to pave a private road if we feel our local community's law enforcement or streets departments are insufficient.

Why, if my family chooses not to use the public schools provided to us and funded by all of us, whether parents of children or not, should we believe the government owes us anything, should we claim that we're saving the government money, or should we expect the government to pay for the costs associated with enrolling our kids in private school?

I believe the responsibility of my family and all other families is to make the best choices we can based on what we can afford and what opportunities are available to us. And I believe the state's responsibility is to fund a public system of education. Please vote no on SB 2400.

Thank you for your service. I am sincerely grateful.

Erin Oban
Bismarck, ND