

Chairman Heinert and House Education Committee Members,

I am writing in opposition of SB 2400 and urge the committee to recommend a no vote.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a robust public school system in the state of North Dakota. Even though our population is small, we manage to deliver high-quality education to students in every corner of the state. Our public schools do this incredible work with tight budgets and limited resources. Public school teachers and staff are magicians, creatively devising solutions to ensure every student has their unique needs met to the best of their abilities.

My greatest concern with this bill is the idea of **choice**. Unfortunately, diverting money from public schools to education savings accounts will not give parents any amount of choice. The **choice** will always lie with the private school admissions committee. Private schools **choose** who can and cannot attend their schools. This means that even if a parent **wants** their child to attend a private school, they don't actually get to decide.

Public schools, by law, must teach **everyone** who walks through the door, including students of every academic ability level, socio-economic status, and background. Students come to our public schools with disabilities, behavioral challenges, and traumas. And though the work of public education is exhaustingly difficult, North Dakota's public school teachers and staff embrace the challenge day in and day out. Even if you've visited in the past, I encourage you and your colleagues to visit our public schools to learn about the vast needs of the students we serve.

In reading SB 2400, I can see positives. I can personally think of many ways I could use the education savings account for my own school-aged children (school meals, educational camps, dual-credit tuition for example). I do appreciate the creativity put forth in figuring out how to make this bill work. However, I'm concerned by the added bureaucracy that will come from this bill. Passage of SB 2400 will lead to additional paperwork for parents and oversight for the ND State Government for what is ultimately pretty minimal impact in today's economy (\$3,500 annually per student). Simply reading the steps families would have to go through to create educational savings accounts makes it seem like a massive task (that we can certainly assume the schools will need to assist families in navigating). **Increasing the per student payment directly to schools** would have a much higher impact with less red tape because those resources could be leveraged across districts in the state rather than consolidated into individual households. If the desire of the legislature is *not* to increase per student payments directly to schools, I would encourage the state consider **funding individual public school priorities** like free school lunches, mental health support, or grants for dual credit courses or standardized testing fees.

Ultimately, I disagree with the bill because it will divert much needed state tax dollars (public funds) from public schools to private schools who do not serve **all** of North Dakota. Again, I encourage you to recommend a no vote on SB 2400.

Sincerely,

Brooke Thiel