



North Dakota Small Organized Schools

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Legislative Testimony in Opposition to SB 2400

Chairman Heinert, members of the House Education committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the sponsors of SB 2400 for their efforts and research into Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) as a means of expanding educational opportunities for North Dakota students. NDSOS is not opposed to expanding educational opportunities for students, it is opposed to the use of public funds for tuition to non-public schools.

The vast majority of students (116,598) in our state attend public schools by choice and those in rural areas, for the most part, do not have a choice. The students (7904) that attend non-public schools are also there by choice. Allocating taxpayer dollars to an ESA program will primarily benefit urban families who have already made the choice to attend non-public schools, while leaving rural students with no comparable choices. Four metro areas representing six communities, Bismarck/Mandan, Fargo/West Fargo, Minot and Dickinson make up the vast majority of non-public school enrollments. This creates a disparity that unfairly favors one segment of the population over another. There are currently fewer than twenty communities in North Dakota with a non-public school option and less than half of those offer a high school option.

Under this bill, taxpayer dollars can be directed to non-public schools that are not subject to the same rules and regulations as our public schools. These institutions are not required to follow open records and open meeting laws, nor are they held to the same fiscal accountability standards. Schools receiving public funds should be held accountable to all the same rules and regulations.

Public schools must serve all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or socioeconomic status. Private schools, however, have the ability, which I fully support, to set admissions criteria. Public dollars should be used in ways that guarantee access, equity, and transparency, principles that are fundamental to our public education system.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to oppose SB 2400 and instead focus on strengthening public education, where taxpayer funds are used with full accountability and accessibility to benefit all North Dakota students. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

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