

March 17, 2025

Representative Pat Heinert, Chairman  
Members of the North Dakota House Education Committee

**Subject: Testimonial Support of Amendment to Senate Bill 2400**

My name is Mike Talley. I am Superintendent of the Standing Rock Community Tribal School in Fort Yates, North Dakota. I am here today to request that the bill be amended to explicitly include tribal grant schools such as ours, which operate independently without partnerships with other institutions. The inclusion of tribal schools in this legislation is crucial for our continued growth, autonomy, and alignment with values of self-determination and tribal sovereignty.

Standing Rock Community School has been a cornerstone of education in our community for many years. As a non-public institution, we have worked diligently to ensure that our students are provided with an education that reflects our culture, language, and values. Unlike public schools, our limited funding is provided by the U.S. Department of the Interior, not the state nor the U.S. Department of Education. This funding model stems from the U.S. government's trust responsibility to Native tribes, recognizing our right to self-governance, including management of our own educational institutions.

Our Standing Rock tribe has chosen to operate an education system that is culturally relevant and aligned with our self-determination. This decision allows us to develop a curriculum that meets educational standards while promoting our cultural heritage. We abide by education standards and regulations, yet take pride in adhering to them in a way that reflects our values and sovereignty.

Under the current version of Senate Bill 2400, Standing Rock Community School would be categorized as a "participating school" because we are a non-public institution. However, we believe it is vital for the bill to explicitly include tribal grant schools such as ours, especially for schools that wish to maintain independence from the state's Century Code laws. We have no intention at this time of operating as, or in partnership with public schools. Instead, we are committed to serving the unique educational needs of our students as a non-public school in a way that aligns with our tribal leadership and cultural values.

Validating that tribal schools, such as ours, are eligible in the Education Savings Account (ESA) program as a "participating school" would provide us with the flexibility to participate in this initiative if we choose, without compromising our autonomy or the principles of tribal sovereignty. This opportunity would allow much needed additional resources and educational opportunities, currently unavailable to our students, ensuring that we can provide them with a quality education tailored to their needs.

We respectfully ask that the North Dakota State House Education Committee, to amend Senate Bill 2400 to explicitly include tribal grant schools. By doing so, you will help us continue to fulfill our mission of providing an education that is true to our heritage and respecting our sovereignty as a tribal nation.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this important matter. We are confident that the passage of SB 2400, with the inclusion of tribal schools, will support the continued success and self-determination of Native American communities such as that of the Standing Rock community.

Mike Talley, Superintendent  
Standing Rock Community School  
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