

Subject: Opposition to SB 2400 - Concerns Regarding Education Savings Account Program

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 2400, which proposes the establishment of an education savings account (ESA) program in North Dakota. While the intention behind this bill may be to provide more educational choices for families, there are several significant concerns that need to be addressed.

1. Impact on Public School Funding: Implementing an ESA program would divert much-needed funds from our public schools to private institutions. This reduction in funding could lead to larger class sizes, fewer resources, and diminished support services for students who remain in public schools. Our public schools are already underfunded, and further financial strain could severely impact the quality of education provided to the majority of North Dakota's students.

2. Lack of Accountability and Oversight: Private schools participating in ESA programs are not held to the same standards of accountability and oversight as public schools. This lack of regulation can lead to inconsistent educational quality and potential misuse of public funds. In states like Arizona, the rapid expansion of ESA programs has resulted in numerous "pop-up" private schools, many of which lack the necessary infrastructure and experience to provide a high-quality education.

3. Negative Impact on Student Achievement: Research has shown that voucher programs, including ESAs, do not consistently improve student achievement. For example, studies from states like Indiana and Louisiana have demonstrated that students using vouchers to attend private schools often perform worse on standardized tests compared to their peers in public schools. In Milwaukee, where one of the largest voucher programs has been in place for nearly two decades, students in the program have shown no significant improvement in test scores.

4. Equity Concerns: Voucher programs tend to benefit families who are already financially better off, as the vouchers rarely cover the full cost of private school tuition. This can exacerbate educational inequities, leaving low-income families and students with disabilities at a disadvantage. In Florida, for instance, the McKay Scholarship Program, which is designed for students with disabilities, has faced criticism for failing to provide adequate support and resource.

In conclusion, while the idea of providing more educational choices is appealing, the implementation of SB 2400 would likely lead to negative consequences for North Dakota's public education system and its students. I urge you to consider these concerns and vote against this bill to ensure that all students in our state have access to a high-quality, equitable education.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Laura Hagan