

FORT RANSOM SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 6

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Testimony in Opposition to HB 1540

To the Chair and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am submitting this testimony in opposition to HB 1540, which proposes the creation of an Education Savings Account (ESA) program. As the Superintendent of the Fort Ransom School District, I have seen firsthand the challenges that rural schools face, particularly in light of declining enrollment and the ongoing difficulty in retaining qualified staff.

Fort Ransom is a small rural district with an enrollment of just 11 students. Recently, our community held a public hearing to discuss the future of our school, driven by concerns about the continued decline in student numbers. It is worth noting that, if not for current school choice options, the enrollment at Fort Ransom would be more than double. Despite these choices, our district still struggles to compete with larger, wealthier districts for staff and resources.

The proposed ESA program would only exacerbate these challenges. Diverting funds to private education options will place additional strain on already underfunded rural districts, like Fort Ransom, which rely heavily on stable public school funding. The financial pressures of declining student enrollment and the diversion of resources through the ESA program could force the closure of schools and further weaken the fabric of rural communities.

Rather than promoting policies that divert public education funding to private options, we should focus on policies that support rural schools. These include efforts to address staffing shortages, secure adequate funding, and ensure high-quality education for every student. The future of rural schools, including those like Fort Ransom, depends on a collective commitment to strengthening public education, not undermining it.

I urge you to consider the long-term effects of HB 1540 on rural schools and vote against this bill. Our children and communities deserve policies that invest in and support public education, not proposals that divide and weaken our educational system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Steven L. Johnson
Superintendent
Fort Ransom School District #6

