

Respectfully Submitted by Megan Gilje, M.Ed. – Grade 4 Teacher, Rolette Public School District

Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

I have been a public school educator for 21 years. I taught in Bismarck for 5 years and in rural school districts for the last 16 years. Regardless of the distinct differences between Class A and Class B schools, one common thread unites every North Dakota public school educator: a passion for our work and an unwavering commitment to the young people we teach.

For those of us teaching in rural school districts, we have to do all this with less. The challenges rural schools face is manyfold in comparison to larger public schools:

- Limited resources for technology, materials, and specialized services.
- Difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified teachers due to lower salaries and fewer professional development opportunities.
- Inadequate transportation funding, which results in longer bus rides for students.
- A lack of access to extracurricular and enrichment activities, as well as college advanced placement and dual credit, due to limited funding and smaller budgets.
- Shrinking rural tax bases.

Rural schools are more dependent on state funding than larger schools. Yet, over the years, state funding for rural school districts has fallen short. If House Bill 1540 becomes law, this challenge will become significantly worse.

In North Dakota, 93% of students are enrolled in public education, with many lacking the option for private schooling. For example, in my community of Rolette, the closest private school is a 90-minute drive away. So, why should my public tax dollars fund an education that is unavailable to my daughters?

Even more important, why is the state government prioritizing private education for a few at the expense of public education for more than 90 percent of her children?

The reason is simple. HB 1540 is a deliberate attempt – advanced by national groups – to undermine public education throughout the United States. Under the guise of ‘personal choice,’ HB 1540 diverts money from public education to private schools, many of which already enjoy strong financial support from alumni and supporters.

If enacted, the ramifications of HB 1540 will have far-reaching consequences on all public schools – the impact will be especially and unfairly pronounced for rural school districts, which will have even fewer resources to work with.

Public education is the greatest American creation. It fosters a skilled workforce and strengthens the middle class. In rural towns, public schools serve as the heart of the community. HB 1540 would plunge a dagger into the heart of rural schools. The bill favors families residing in North Dakota’s metro areas, discriminates against rural students, and is grossly unfair to taxpayers in rural school districts.

I urge you to vote NO on HB 1540.

Sincerely,

Megan Gilje, M. Ed.  
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