

Senate Education Committee Members

I was born and raised in North Dakota, raised our family here and are now watching two of our grandchildren grow up in this area. I attended public school, our children all attended public schools and our grandchildren are currently attending public school in Minot. I am writing to ask you to oppose HB 1540, which would provide an educational savings account to students who are home-schooled or attend private schools.

The North Dakota constitution provides for free public education for all students. Those public schools have to admit **all** students regardless of race, religion, disability, etc. In contrast, private schools can, and do, decide which students they will accept and the schools with a religious affiliation will often reject students who do not meet their standards (LGBTQ students or students from a different religious background). In addition, they are not required to provide any assistance or adaptation for students with emotional needs or disabilities. Many people have said that this bill gives families more choice in their children's' education but only if their children would be accepted by the private schools. I would argue that this bill just takes money away from the public schools that are required to educate all students.

With the discussion that the Department of Education will likely close, I am wondering how that will impact funding for our public schools in North Dakota. This is especially important when it comes to meeting the needs of students with an IEP and with disabilities. As we are sitting at a very uncertain time with the federal funding, this bill would take more monies away from public schools that will need additional funds for special needs students in our state.

My other concern with this bill is that it provides unequal treatment to children who live in urban versus rural areas. There are very few, if any, private schools in the rural areas of our state, so those families living in those areas would not have an opportunity to send their children to a private school and be able to utilize these monies. In addition, many of our rural schools are struggling and depend on state dollars to provide their students with the education they deserve.

Please give HB 1540 a Do Not Pass recommendation from this committee.

Thank you,
Jane Hirst