

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Kayla Tatro, and I am a middle school teacher at Roosevelt Public School in Carson. I am writing in opposition of House Bill 1540, which seeks to establish Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs) for North Dakota students.

Public dollars should not fund private education. Private schools do not have to educate all students, as public schools do. Furthermore, private schools lack the oversight and accountability for their expenditures that is required of public schools. Public schools must be accountable for every taxpayer dollar spent. This bill lacks the accountability that is required of taxpayer dollars. How will the state ensure that the ESA funds are being used for allowable expenses?

Educational savings accounts or vouchers only benefit students living in or near our largest North Dakota cities. Carson is 60 miles from the nearest private school with some of my students living up to 90 miles away from the nearest private school. My students, like a majority of rural students across the state, will not benefit from these ESAs. ESAs will increase the educational disparity between our urban and rural students.

Additionally, I am concerned about the cost of this bill. HB 1540 will cost our state \$40 million in 2026-2027 and another \$80 million in 2027-2028. Similar programs in other states have led to substantial cost increases over time. Public schools are already struggling financially. \$120 million would be much better spent over the next two school years in our public schools to support students across our state- regardless of their zip code, ability, or financial status.

In conclusion, House Bill 1540 threatens to weaken public education in North Dakota. We should be proud of the top-notch public education our state provides and continue to invest in our public schools accordingly. HB 1540 diverts critical resources from public schools and lacks the accountability that is required of taxpayer dollars. I implore you to consider the long-term impacts of this bill and to stand against it in support of our public education system. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kayla Tatro