

1 HB1540– ESA Bill

2 Mandan Public Schools – Mike Bitz, Superintendent

3 Good morning, Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee. For the record,
4 my name is Mike Bitz. I am fortunate to serve as the superintendent for Mandan Public Schools.
5 Thank you for all you do to support education in ND. I am here today to ask you to oppose
6 HB1540. I will be brief.

7

8 **Private schools getting public dollars is not new.** I have been a school administrator since 1991,
9 and private schools have been receiving federal dollars for their school lunch program and they
10 also receive federal title dollars. **No one has an issue with this because private schools abide**
11 **by the same rules as public schools.** The federal government is often accused of being wasteful,
12 but they do require accountability for public dollars. ND should so the same.

13

14 HB1540 appropriates \$72,000,000 to private schools without private schools having to account for
15 a nickel of how the appropriation is spent. As a Conservative and a ND taxpayer, I will tell you
16 that this is not only bad government, it is wrong. ND has great private schools, with good people
17 working in them, but giving anyone \$72,000,000 without any accountability is a bad idea. If you
18 approve this bill, please put guardrails in place to ensure full accountability for these dollars. The
19 taxpayers of ND deserve this.

20

21 Finally, I find it confusing that the legislature is also considering a parent’s rights bill, that in its
22 current form will not apply to private schools, even if they take public dollars. If a private school
23 accepts public dollars, shouldn’t we expect them to open their board meetings and welcome parents
24 to attend, and have the ability to address the school board? Should parents really need to forfeit
25 their rights as parents if the private school chooses to admit their child? Accepting public dollars
26 means accepting public accountability! The fiscal note on this bill means these are public dollars

27

28 Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I urge you to vote NO on HB1540. At a
29 minimum if you are going to approve this bill, amend it and give taxpayers the fiscal accountability
30 they deserve. I would be happy to stand for any questions.

31