

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing in opposition to HB 1540, which would set up an Educational Savings Account for non-public school students. I want my tax dollars to support our public schools. Therefore, I respectfully ask for a “no” vote on HB 1540.

I keep asking myself why I care so deeply about the negative impacts of HB 1540 and the answer is simple: the kids. As a proud North Dakota public school educator with 34 years of experience, I believe all children deserve access to the strongest public education possible, both now and in the future. For the last two decades of my teaching career, I have worked in a high-poverty school, and I have seen firsthand the challenges families face. It's for the first student who came to my Books & Braids program at my school and last year sent me a letter telling me that she is on her way to becoming a teacher, and for the student whose mom is working two jobs and still struggling to make ends meet, for the student who is homeless, for the student in foster care, and for the students whose needs go far beyond the curriculum. All students, including these students and students like them across the state who might not have someone to advocate for them, deserve to have the best public education—where dollars are not going to private schools that remain out of reach for many families, even with Education Savings Accounts. I am deeply concerned that these Education Savings Account bills will further disadvantage the very students who need support the most.

While some claim that this bill "levels the playing field," this is far from the truth. Families living in poverty face significant barriers that Education Savings Accounts cannot erase, making these school “choices” unrealistic for some families. Even with financial assistance, many cannot afford private school tuition, uniforms, or reliable transportation. In fact, in many states, private schools increased tuition after bills such as this were implemented. These barriers make private schools an unrealistic “choice” for many of the families I have dedicated my career to serving.

Additionally, this bill lacks the accountability, transparency, and commitment to equitable access that public schools are required to uphold. Private schools receiving Educational Savings Account funds are not held to the same standards for student outcomes or financial reporting. This creates an unfair system that disadvantages the very students this bill claims to support.

Public education is the true equalizer—a system designed to welcome and support **EVERY** child, including those with special needs, regardless of their background or income. Unless private schools are required to accept all students, provide the services they need, and maintain the same level of transparency as public schools, taxpayer dollars must remain in public education. An Education Savings Account weakens the foundation that serves the vast majority of North Dakota's children.

I urge you to vote NO on HB 1540 and instead invest in strengthening our public schools—the most effective way to ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Kind regards,

Sara Medalen

Academic Interventionist and 2020 North Dakota Teacher of the Year