

I am a teacher and a concerned parent with young children enrolled in public school and residing in Hatton, ND. I want to express my strong opposition to HB1540, a voucher bill that threatens to further destabilize our already underfunded public education system in North Dakota.

This bill proposes to divert vital public funds away from our public schools and allocate them to private institutions through a voucher system. This approach is fundamentally flawed and will have detrimental consequences for the vast majority of North Dakota's children.

### **The Reality of Public Education in North Dakota:**

- **Underfunding:** Our public schools are already grappling with insufficient resources. Teachers are stretched thin, classrooms are overcrowded, and essential programs are being cut. This bill will exacerbate these problems by siphoning away critical funding.
- **Majority Attendance:** It is essential to recognize that approximately 93% of North Dakota's students attend public schools. These schools are the cornerstone of our communities, providing a quality education to the overwhelming majority of our children. Diverting funds from these institutions will directly harm the education of most students in our state.
- **Teacher Recruitment and Retention Crisis:** North Dakota, like many other states, is facing a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. This crisis is compounded by low salaries, limited resources, and increasing workloads. HB1540 will only worsen this situation by further diminishing the resources available to support our dedicated educators.
- **Lack of Accountability:** Private schools receiving public voucher funds are often not held to the same standards of accountability as public schools. This lack of transparency and oversight raises concerns about the quality of education being provided and the proper use of taxpayer dollars.
- **Increased Inequality:** Voucher programs tend to disproportionately benefit wealthier families who can afford to supplement the voucher amount, further widening the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged. Public schools are designed to provide equal access to education for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

### **The Impact of HB1540:**

- By diverting funds, HB1540 will force public schools to make even more drastic cuts, impacting essential programs such as special education, arts, and extracurricular activities.
- This bill will undermine the principle of public education as a common good, fracturing our communities and creating a two-tiered education system.
- It will further strain our already struggling teacher workforce, leading to increased teacher shortages and a decline in the quality of instruction.

Instead of diverting scarce resources, we should be investing in our public schools, providing our teachers with the support they need, and ensuring that all children have access to a quality education.

I urge the committee to reject HB1540 and prioritize the needs of our public schools and the vast majority of North Dakota's students.