

HB 1540
Senate Education Committee
March 17, 2025

Chair Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Ana Tobiasz. I reside in Mandan, ND and have four children in the Mandan Public School System. I strongly urge a DO NOT PASS on HB 1540.

While my children currently attend public schools, my children have also attended the private schools in Bismarck. Due to the lack of opportunities that were present in the private school system, lack of bus transportation, as well as lack of support for our child with specific learning needs, we opted to transfer all of our children to the public school system and have been extremely satisfied with the services offered. In the private school system, anytime there was additional coursework needed it was accomplished through our robust public school system. The opportunities that students have in the Mandan School system as an example are exceptional for those who want to or need to take advantage, including the opportunities available through ND Distance Education and the career center.

Private schools receive their funding by tuition and community donations. They can increase the cost of tuition at any time if they need to increase services and are not bound by the same standards for admission. Public schools are required to provide services for all and in my experience have been a much better fit for my child with special learning needs. **This bill does not increase the amount of funds the private school receives, it just changes the source of a portion of the funding and removes funding for public schools.**

Families in this state already have school choice. You legally have the choice to send your children to public school, private school, or to homeschool. Geographically in the state of ND, the majority of students do not have access to private schools unless residing in one of the more urban areas of the state. There are already opportunities for additional coursework through ND Distance Education for those who reside in rural areas who may not have as many courses available in the smaller school districts. The bill sponsor argues that this would improve this access when these services are already robust and available to any public school student.

Families who want their children to have religion intertwined with their education can pay for their children to attend private school. There are other means to provide a religious foundation to your children, such as attending your local church services and what you teach at home yourself. Taxpayer dollars should not be utilized to fund your choice of religious upbringing.

Additionally, **directing taxpayer dollars to private religious schools is in direct contradiction to the ND Constitution. As referenced in Section VIII, Section 5: "All colleges, universities, and other educational institutions, for the support of which lands have been granted to this state, or which are supported by a public tax, shall remain under the absolute and exclusive control of the state. No money raised for the support of the public schools of the state shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school."**

It is to everyone's benefit to have a well educated community. We all do better as a society if everyone has opportunities. **Should individuals who do not have school age children and do not directly receive the benefits of the public schools receive a tax credit to use as they seem fit?** That is essentially the argument being used by the bill sponsors to justify the development of an education savings account.

We need to focus on making sure our public schools have the funds they need, not funneling money to individuals who choose to send their children to a private or religious based school.

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As a taxpayer, I am happy for my tax dollars to go to support children receiving a public school education and to ensure our educators are appropriately paid and our schools have the resources they need to serve our community. Undoubtedly the public school system is imperfect; but rather than funneling money away from public schools, we should invest in the structure already present to allow more opportunities within the public school system rather than taking away funding. Religion plays a different role for every person. My tax dollars should not be used to fund any religious views preferentially over others.

Respectfully submitted,

Ana Tobiasz