



Kidder County Public School District#1

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Oppositional Testimony on House Bill 1540

My name is Rick Diegel and I am the superintendent of schools at the Kidder County School District in Steele, North Dakota. This testimony is to voice my strong opposition to House Bill 2400, which provides 50% of the foundation aide payment to private school students.

As a school leader, I see firsthand how every dollar impacts our students, teachers, and community. While the idea of giving families more educational choices might sound appealing, the reality is that this bill threatens the quality and stability of our public schools—especially in rural areas like Kidder County.

This is my 38th year in education and my 25th year as a school superintendent, with all 38 years in what is considered a small, class B school district. During this time, I have seen public schools are the backbone of our communities, particularly in rural areas where we don't have private school options nearby. House Bill 1540 would take funds away from our public schools to support private education, but the majority of families in Kidder County won't even have access to these alternatives.

House Bill 1540 would provide over \$5700 to each student that attends a private school. However, there is no accountability that is associated with this government subsidy. There are no open records, no open meetings, no public audits, they only accept students that fit their definition of a "good student". In my public school, we have open records, open meetings, publicly available audits and we accept all students, regardless of income level, special education status, poverty level or other challenges.

This fiscal note for HB 1540 is \$43 million, and Light of Christ in Bismarck alone will get over \$7.5 million from the state. Compare that to Kidder County School receiving \$3.2 million, Napoleon School receiving \$2.7 million and Linton School receiving \$2.5 million. Light of Christ will receive nearly as much as all three of these school combined!

Not one time in my career has a patron told me that private school students should receive a payment from the government to help cover their tuition. However, I have had more patrons that I can count tell me that their property taxes are too high. And with that said, here we are considering spending \$43 million on private school students' tuition, while not providing any property tax relief to Ag land and our farmers.

Someone is going to have to explain to me how we can consider providing \$43 million to private school students and not property tax relief to our farmers, because that simply doesn't make sense to me.

Please do the right thing and vote no on HB 1540. Thank you and I will stand for any questions.