

## Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 1540

Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity written testimony in opposition to House Bill 1540. My name is Dr. Nick Klemisch, and I proudly serve as the Superintendent of Garrison Public Schools. I am here today to voice my concerns regarding this legislation and its implications for rural public schools in North Dakota.

Public dollars must be dedicated to public schools. The cornerstone of our state's education system is ensuring that every child, regardless of zip code, has access to a high-quality education. House Bill 1540 threatens to divert critical funding away from our public schools—institutions that serve the vast majority of North Dakota students. By shifting taxpayer dollars away from public schools, we risk undermining the very foundation of our state's education system, which is rooted in equitable access and opportunity.

Rural schools are the lifeblood of our communities. They provide not only education but also serve as community hubs, economic drivers, and vital centers of civic engagement. However, year after year, we continue to see legislative proposals that reallocate funds away from rural districts to benefit larger school systems. House Bill 1540 is yet another example of this troubling trend. Rural schools already face significant financial challenges, including declining enrollment, increasing operational costs, and difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. By prioritizing funding mechanisms that disproportionately benefit larger communities, specifically those with private schools, this legislation exacerbates the inequities between urban and rural education.

Furthermore, the proposed redirection of funds fails to recognize the unique challenges that rural schools must navigate. Our districts operate on tight budgets, stretching every dollar to ensure that students receive the best education possible. Unlike larger districts, we do not have the same economies of scale, alternative revenue streams, or the ability to absorb financial losses without significant consequences. If this bill passes, rural schools will be forced to make difficult decisions—whether that means cutting programs, reducing staff, or increasing class sizes—all of which negatively impact student outcomes.

If our state is serious about strengthening education, we must ensure that public dollars remain committed to supporting public schools. We must advocate for policies that provide fair and adequate funding to all public schools, regardless of geographic location. It is our responsibility to uphold the promise of public education and ensure that every child, whether from a rural or urban district, has the resources needed to succeed.

I strongly urge you to reject House Bill 1540 and instead focus on legislative efforts that invest in all North Dakota students equitably. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.