

Chairman Beard and members of the Committee,

My name is Kendall Bergrud and I am a math teacher at Wachter Middle School in Bismarck. I am the 2025 North Dakota Teacher of the Year, an honor I hold with great pride as it reflects my commitment to the success of all students. I am here to share my opposition as a private citizen to HB 1540 as it is a bill that would benefit only some of North Dakota's students, and would hurt our public schools in the process.

At public schools around the state, we work hard to create an inclusive environment for all students no matter their range of abilities. Creating an environment where students feel like they are included and have the support they need is essential for them to thrive with their learning. Every year, I see students seriously struggling academically and behaviorally; and every year, because of the support they receive as a part of their personalized education plans, from their special education teachers, and their classroom teachers, many of these students grow as learners and build their confidence, socially and academically. I see countless students who start the year facing challenges that feel overwhelming, but end up excelling in their classes as a result of the support and resources that are available to them in the public schools. Don't get me wrong: these students are responsible for their own success, but their success stories are also a testament to the power of a high quality public education. Public schools work hard to provide the resources and support that students need for their learning styles. Alternatively, private schools, though oftentimes excellent schools, are not tasked with the obligation and privilege of educating every child in North Dakota. As a result, when they turn students with behavioral or social needs away - and if the past is any indication of the future, they *will* turn these students away - public schools will welcome them with open arms and help them chart a path to success.

And that's the issue with HB 1540: instead of providing schools that educate all students with the resources they need to achieve that goal, this bill would undercut those very resources. Public Schools are already facing budget constraints, and sending public dollars to private schools will only stretch our state's public school resources thinner. If we truly want to build a strong future here in North Dakota, we need to properly invest in the public education system, which educates more than 90% of our state's students. The tens of millions of dollars proposed for private school tuition would go a

long way toward properly funding our public schools. If you don't believe me, I encourage you to visit a public school in your district to see the great things happening there, and while you're there, ask if they have everything they need. I bet they don't. For the reasons stated above, I encourage you to recommend a do not pass on HB 1540 and instead, look at ways to support and strengthen our public schools, ensuring that every North Dakota student has access to the high-quality education they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your work for the people of North Dakota. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.