

March 17, 2025

Re: HB 1540

Dear Members of the Senate,

As parents, it's our duty to educate and form our children into responsible, contributing citizens with honesty and integrity. As Christian parents, it is also our duty to raise our children to know, love, and serve God. It is our right and responsibility to choose how best to execute these duties & it is the responsibility of our government to assist parents in that execution.

While public schools can meet some of our requirements, they do not meet all and are not always the environment that best suits the needs of every child. For years, the state has given NO assistance to the parents whose children's needs are best met in a private school setting. The state has failed in its responsibility to assist parents in the education of these children.

When the military brought us to Minot, we fully intended to put our children in public school. However, when we learned how large the public schools were, we knew that they would not be the best learning environments for our children. Based on their learning styles, we knew our children needed more individual attention than the public schools here could provide. Therefore, we made the very scary financial decision to enroll them at Bishop Ryan Catholic Schools. Over the next five years, even though our income was low enough that we qualified for the WIC program, we somehow came up with the money to pay the tuition each year.

We'd planned to move upon military retirement to a more rural area closer to family. Instead, we ended up staying in Minot solely because of BRCS and our church here. We are now in our 20th year of paying tuition (several thousand each year) scrimping, saving, and pinching every penny to do so, while my husband commutes 75 miles twice a day for work, and 160 miles to help my cousin farm. For the last fifteen years we've been paying property taxes in Minot. Our children have never received any benefits from those tax dollars, with the exception of when one of our sons was on the Jim Hill swim team one year, and another son was in the Vivace Orchestra one year.

Shouldn't the monies that our state designates to educate its young people belong to ALL of those young people? Shouldn't it be used to educate those young people no matter what school they attend (as long as accredited)? Why are we being penalized for sending our children to the school that best meets their needs for both academic & human formation? The state is failing to meet its obligation.

Four of our 6 children have graduated from BRCS, attend/ed ND colleges, and are living and working in ND, contributing to our state's economy. The oldest owns her own business (Far Out Nuts), the second is a mechanical engineer for Bobcat, the third is a project manager in risk management for an insurance company, and the fourth is studying cybersecurity, interning with Doosan. The fifth is taking college courses through BSC as a sophomore in HS, considering Electrical Engineering, Cybersecurity, or Information Technology Management as majors. The sixth is still considering his options. BRCS has done an exemplary job of assisting us in educating and molding our children into contributing citizens of this great state. It's time for the state to step up to do its part.

Thank you for your work on the Education Committee.

Sincerely,

Mary Finley
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