

To the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to urge you to vote no to a bill that would use public dollars to offset private school costs, HB 1540.

North Dakota has worked to provide for a high-quality public education system, while being responsible with the way we spend this money. We need high-quality schools that are not competing for taxpayer dollars with private schools and what would possibly be a proliferation of "nonpublic" options seeking to establish themselves with the money set aside for these proposals. Public education provides open access to high quality education with the money provided by the state. If those who would like to select another "nonpublic" option do, it does not need to be with the state's money for the education that they have elected out of.

North Dakotans have opposed voucher programs in the past, and by changing the name to Educational savings account and disqualifying public school students, we're ignoring what has happened when this has come to the ballot. Educational savings accounts, scholarship programs, whatever the name, if they privilege "nonpublic" schools or make students ineligible because they attend a public school, they are essentially a voucher program.

While ESAs may make access to "nonpublic" choices easier for some, it may also raise the cost of tuition or any of these related educational services or expenses since the money is there. We've seen similar rises in costs when it comes to medications and health insurance: the prices go up to utilize the dollars that are in the market. The cost for "nonpublic" schools may seem more palatable when it's being offset by these ESAs, so the cost of providing these services may ultimately go up.

I want the best possible education for my child. As an educator in a public school, I see how hard my colleagues work each day to provide a high-quality education. This is our life. When we are dealing with public school facilities that need to be updated or curriculum to provide the best for our students, we seek to be responsible with the funding the state provides us. We are beholden to standards that "nonpublic" institutions are not, such as academic, access, and quality standards. Public funds should remain in public schools, where they serve all students, regardless of ability, background, or financial status. We know we need to do more for student mental health and to create competitive salaries for these professionals, and we can't be in competition for the funding that is currently being provided. As a state, we weren't ready to provide school lunches to 100% of public school students, though we did move in expanding that access. This speaks to concerns about the cost when those would have been available to every student who took advantage of the public education North Dakota is already committed to. To allow these ESAs would privilege certain students instead of working to provide for the vast majority North Dakota students.

We know that we want to do more for all students, and keeping public money for public education allows that choice for all families in our state. If they choose not to access public

education, that is a choice they're making for themselves, and the state shouldn't be subsidizing that choice when the state is providing high quality schools open to all and can hold those public institutions to account, ensuring the high-quality education that North Dakotans expect in all communities. Please vote no on HB 1540. Thanks for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony McIntyre". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "A".

Anthony McIntyre

English Instructor

Jamestown High School