

Chairman Beard and Senate Education Committee Members,

My name is Erin Oban, and I am here to express my personal opposition to HB 1540 as informed now by a bunch of different experiences and perspectives, some of which I want to share with you today.

- I grew up as a Class B kid in a small, rural town, where I attended the same K-12 school in the same solitary building (and even with one or two of the same teachers) as my parents.
- After graduating from high school, I attended one of our state's public universities for one semester and then transferred to a private university where I graduated with a teaching degree.
- Just before graduating, I completed my student teaching requirements at Marmot School, known to most of you as the Youth Correctional Center (YCC). After receiving my degree, I continued to serve as a substitute teacher at YCC before getting my first full-time teaching job as a junior high math and technology teacher at a parochial school here in Bismarck.
- In 2014, I was elected to the State Senate, representing District 35 in central Bismarck where, for 4 legislative sessions, I sat on this very committee and debated these very issues.
- After almost 8 years in the Senate, in 2022, I was appointed to serve as the State Director of USDA Rural Development, a federal agency that made more than 70 programs available to provide loans, loan guarantees, and grants available to our country's rural communities and residents and to the cooperatives and organizations that serve rural people and places. I learned a great deal about the unique needs and challenges that rural areas experience in terms of accessing capital, building out infrastructure, and scaling and delivering services that provide a quality of life that we would all want for ourselves, no matter our zip code.
- And lastly, for 8.5 years, I've been a mom to a now 2<sup>nd</sup> grader who has benefited tremendously from the village of family, friends, childcare providers, and private preschool and public elementary school teachers who have helped my husband and I with our best job and most important responsibility – being parents to him.

I'm a product of private and public schools. I've taught and been a substitute teacher in private and public schools. I've lived and worked in some of our smallest, rural communities and right here in one of our state's largest. In every one of those scenarios, there were great, good, average, not so great, and even a couple pretty terrible teachers, leaders, kids, and parents. In some, resources and opportunities and supports were scarce

and limited. In others, they were plentiful. Some of the outcomes were incredible. Some of them, not so much.

I share these perspectives and experiences because they've all helped shape my opinion on bills like HB 1540.

Just as I have throughout my own educational path and now in guiding our child's, I wholly support school choice. I've always supported parents and families who, for whatever their reasons, choose public, private, parochial, or homeschool education for their children. What I do not support is the government and taxpayers picking up the tab for people who choose not to use the publicly-funded option. And honestly, and especially after serving in the legislature, I'm very much surprised by how many legislators seem to believe that it is somehow the government's responsibility to create and fund an entitlement program to subsidize the personal responsibilities and individual choices of others, because that's what a voucher program is and does.

My family doesn't believe the government owes us anything, claim that we're saving the government money, or expect the government to pay for our private vehicle if we choose not to use the public transportation system.

My family doesn't believe the government owes us anything, claim that we're saving the government money, or expect the government to pay for our backyard swingset or a pool or private golf club membership if we choose not to use public parks, pools, and golf courses.

My family doesn't believe the government owes us anything, claim that we're saving the government money, or expect the government to pay for us to hire private security or to pave a private road if we feel our local community's law enforcement and streets departments are insufficient.

Why, if my family chooses not to use the public schools provided to us and funded by all of us, whether we have children or not, should we believe the government owes us anything, should we claim that we're saving the government money, or should we expect the government to pay for the costs associated with non-public school tuition.

The responsibility of my family and all families is to make the best choices we can based on what we can afford and what opportunities we have available to us. Our state's responsibility is to fund public education.

Please uphold your responsibility, and we will continue to uphold ours by paying for our own choices and decisions. Thank you for your service. I am sincerely grateful.

Erin Oban  
Bismarck, ND