

Opposition to HB1540

My name is Leslie Bieber, and I am the Superintendent of Alexander Public School District. I am here to testify in strong opposition to HB1540.

Public schools operate within a strictly regulated financial structure, ensuring that every dollar is accounted for and spent with full transparency. In Alexander Public School District, after the state funding formula is applied, we receive \$2,799 per student to educate every child, regardless of their background, learning abilities, or challenges. HB1540 proposes to give a private school \$5,536 per student from state funds, nearly double. And these private institutions will not be subject to the same oversight, open meeting laws, or accountability standards.

Supporters of this bill argue that private school families pay taxes just like everyone else and should have public funding follow them to their private institution of choice. But that is not how public funding works, the dollar does not follow the taxpayer.

By this logic, if I pay taxes in my city, which funds public parks, but I choose to play basketball at the YMCA instead, should the state pay for 50% of my YMCA membership? If I pay property taxes that fund public libraries but choose to buy books at a private bookstore, should my taxes reimburse me? The answer is **NO**. Public funds support public services that exist for the benefit of all citizens, not selective individual choices.

If a private school wants public money, it should be required to:

1. Accept all students, just as public schools do.
2. Follow all open meeting and public records laws that public schools must follow.
3. Be fully accountable for how taxpayer dollars are spent.

I strongly urge you to vote **NO** on HB 1540 unless it guarantees full financial transparency, equal admission policies, and the same accountability standards for all schools receiving public funds.

Thank you for your time and for considering the long-term impact this bill will have on public education in North Dakota.