



North Dakota Small Organized Schools

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2 **Testimony in Opposition to ND Senate Bill 2241**

3 Chairman Beard, members of the committee, my name is Michael Heilman, Executive Director of North
4 Dakota Small Organized Schools. I am here on behalf of the 140+ member schools to testify in
5 opposition to Senate Bill 2241, which seeks to establish public charter schools in North Dakota. While
6 proponents argue that charter schools offer educational choice, the reality is that their implementation
7 would significantly and negatively impact our rural public schools. Specifically, this bill threatens rural
8 education through loss of students, loss of funding, and increased competition for already scarce
9 resources, including teachers, support staff, and administrators.

10 **Loss of Students**

11 In rural North Dakota, our public schools are the backbone of our communities. Unlike urban areas with
12 higher population densities, rural schools serve vast geographic regions with limited student
13 populations. The introduction of charter schools would siphon students away from traditional public
14 schools, leading to declining enrollment numbers. Even a modest decrease in student population can be
15 devastating for rural districts, as our funding and ability to maintain programs are tied directly to
16 enrollment figures. Unlike larger districts that may absorb such losses more easily, rural schools operate
17 on thin margins, meaning that any reduction in student numbers directly threatens their viability.

18 **Loss of Funding**

19 North Dakota's public schools are funded primarily through state allocations based on student
20 enrollment. When students leave a district for a charter school, the state funding follows them. This
21 means that already financially strained rural schools will receive fewer dollars, forcing them to make
22 difficult choices about program cuts, staff reductions, or even school closures. The reality is that rural
23 schools do not have the same economies of scale as larger districts. They cannot simply consolidate
24 classrooms or shift resources without serious consequences to the quality of education they provide. If
25 SB 2241 is enacted, rural schools could find themselves in a financial death spiral, unable to
26 maintain essential programs such as advanced courses in required curricula, career and technical
27 education programing, special education programing, and extracurricular activities that keep
28 students engaged and prepare them for future success.

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The mission of NDSOS is to provide leadership for the small/rural schools in North Dakota and to support legislation favorable to their philosophy while opposing legislation that is harmful.

29 **Competition for Limited Resources**

30 North Dakota already faces a significant shortage of qualified teachers, support staff, and
31 administrators, particularly in rural areas. Charter schools would exacerbate this crisis by further dividing
32 the already limited pool of educational professionals. Rural districts struggle to recruit and retain
33 educators due to lower salaries, geographic isolation, and fewer professional development
34 opportunities. Charter schools raise the risk of increased loss of educators from public schools, leaving
35 rural districts unable to staff classrooms with qualified personnel. This would create an inequitable
36 system where some students receive a well-resourced education while others are left with
37 underfunded, understaffed schools.

38 Additionally, rural schools often rely on shared services such as special education teachers and
39 coordinators, school counselors, and administration. The introduction of charter schools would divert
40 these limited resources, further straining the ability of public schools to provide essential services to
41 students with special needs, behavioral challenges, or those requiring additional academic support.

42 **Conclusion**

43 Senate Bill 2241 threatens to undermine the stability of rural education in North Dakota. By diverting
44 students, funding, and critical resources away from traditional public schools, it jeopardizes the quality
45 and sustainability of education in many of our communities. Our priority must be strengthening our
46 existing public schools, not creating parallel systems that weaken them.

47 I urge this committee to reject SB 2241 and instead invest in policies that support and enhance our
48 public education system, particularly in rural areas where every student, educator, and dollar is essential
49 to maintaining a strong educational foundation.

50 Thank you, Chairman Beard and members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony.

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