

February 3rd, 2025

To Chris Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Josh Nelson. I am a resident of Northwood, ND located in Legislative District 20. I am also a public-school teacher in my 16th year working in public education. The views in this letter reflect my views alone and not necessarily those of my school district. I am writing this letter in opposition to SB 2295.

I urge the Senate Education Committee to weigh heavily the negative impacts of SB 2295 and any other bills in consideration that divert or allocate public tax dollars away from public education towards private and home school education.

I personally have no problem with a parent or family choosing to privately educate or homeschool their children. That is a choice and a right every parent in North Dakota currently has. My issue is with the funding of private school or homeschool is with public dollars comes with a multitude of issues. Such as.

1. **Violation of the Establishment clause in the constitution.** Giving state aid to private schools that may be religious in nature is in direct violation to separation of church and state.
2. **The Draining of public funds.** Giving a voucher, or direct aid, only further depletes the ability for our state to fund public education. We are a state which has historically prided itself on our strong public education system. This bill does nothing but undermine the potential quality for our public schools. We currently have an aging public-school infrastructure with many communities still using century old schools. North Dakota also has some of the lowest paid teachers in our country. We are facing teacher shortages in almost every subject, and grade level in our state. Passing bills like SB 2295 only further exacerbates the problem.
3. **Lack of oversight and accountability.** SB 2295 is no different than the bills from the last session or some other bills this session, in that there is no accountability for using public money. Our public schools are held to a high standard in the accounting process, and the requirements that must be met in order to receive public tax dollars from the state. Where is the accountability on private and home schools that would be receiving public tax dollars shrouded as a voucher? These are still public funds no matter what name is given to them. SB 2295 and similar bills never provide for this oversight.
4. **Education Inequality.** SB 2295 could possibly cause inequities of education. A majority of North Dakota's students live in rural areas, located an hour or more away

from private school options. Only urban children would gain a benefit. And who is to stop private schools from raising their rates when they know students are being backed by the state. One could look no further than our university systems that do that very same thing when they already know each student has access to Federal Financial Aid, which has led to astronomical tuition costs. Leading to only wealthy students gaining benefit from legislation like SB 2295. This creates a class system for education. Which goes against many of our North Dakota traditions. As for homeschooling, how many parents of disadvantaged children could afford to stay home and educate their children even with bills like SB 2295. Only those families who are well off could still afford to do this. Again, SB 2295 benefits very few in North Dakota and has the potential to great harm to our public education system.

Thank you for hearing my testimony in opposition to SB 2295. Again I urge the committee to weigh the pros and cons of bills like this and the potentially great harm that can come from essentially defunding public education.

Sincerely,

Josh Nelson

Resident of District 20