



Great Public Schools

Great Public Service

**Testimony Before the Senate Education Committee
SB 2295
February 4, 2025**

Chair Beard and members of the Committee, for the record, my name is Nick Archuleta, and I am the president of North Dakota United. On behalf of our 11,000 members, I rise today in opposition to SB 2295 and urge a ***do not pass*** recommendation for this proposed legislation. North Dakota United has a long history of opposing proposals that divert monies raised for public education and other public purposes to non-public educational entities. Unfortunately, SB2295 is yet another such proposal, albeit a bit more creative than most. While we appreciate the effort of the sponsor to try to make it so that some public schools may benefit from the bill, it remains a bill that we cannot support.

I want to make it very clear that North Dakota United DOES NOT oppose school choice. We believe that parents already enjoy the choice of sending their children to private schools, parochial schools, or to homeschool their children. Our issue is when public dollars are used to fund that choice.

North Dakota's public schools have the responsibility of educating every student that walks, runs, rolls, or is carried through our schoolhouse doors. This is a responsibility unique to public schools and we embrace it wholeheartedly because we agree with the principles enshrined in the North Dakota State Constitution.

Private schools and parochial schools do not share that responsibility. They do not have an obligation to educate every student. They alone determine who will and will not attend their schools or avail themselves of their services. They can discriminate against any student for any reason. An example of this is that most private schools do not accept students based on ability because the financial costs of educating students with cognitive impairments are quite high. As a result, and with immense pride, public schools almost exclusively educate these students. And we are honored to do so.

Mr. Chairman, SB 2295 threatens the integrity of North Dakota's public education system by redirecting funds that should be used to support our public schools, and other public prerogatives. Public education is a cornerstone of our democracy, and it is our state's responsibility to ensure that all children have access to quality education regardless of their socioeconomic status or zip code. By diverting resources away from public schools, SB 2295 undermines the ability of school districts to provide adequate staffing, up-to-date learning materials, and essential student services.

Furthermore, this bill would exacerbate existing inequities between school districts. Most rural and mid-sized schools have no access to private schools so all the funding from this bill will just go to large districts that have private schools.

Members of the Committee, public schools are accountable to taxpayers, with locally elected school boards providing direct oversight of the funds allocated to the school district. SB 2295, however, introduces a system in which public funds may be used without the same level of public scrutiny, reducing transparency, and limiting taxpayers' ability to ensure their money is spent responsibly. Without clear oversight mechanisms, the public cannot be confident that their tax dollars are being spent for the purposes intended.

Now more than ever, our focus should be on strengthening North Dakota's public schools, not weakening them. Rather than passing legislation that undermines public schools, we should be striving to ensure that every child in North Dakota receives a high-quality education in a well-funded and well-supported public school system as the framers of our North Dakota State Constitution intended.

With that, I'll conclude my testimony and urge a ***do not pass*** recommendation for SB 2295.