

Testimony in Opposition to SB2295

Chairman Beard and Members of the Committee,

My name is Leslie Bieber and I am the Superintendent of Alexander Public School. I am in opposition to Senate Bill 2295, which proposes the expansion of Education Savings Accounts (ESA) to direct public funds toward private schools and home education without requiring the same level of transparency, accountability, or adherence to state education standards as public schools.

Impact on Public Schools and Rural Districts

Public education serves as the foundation of our democracy, ensuring every child has access to a free and fair education. By diverting public funds away from public schools, we risk weakening the very institutions that serve the majority of North Dakota's students, especially in small, rural communities where public schools are often the only viable option.

Redirecting ESA Funds for Universal School Meals

If the Legislature is committed to ensuring all students benefit from state funding, a more effective and equitable use of these funds would be to guarantee free breakfast and lunch for every student in North Dakota. No matter where a child receives their education—public, private, or home school—all children need access to nutritious meals to thrive.

Providing universal school meals would:

- Ensure no child in North Dakota goes hungry during the school day.
- Support families by alleviating the financial burden of meal costs.
- Improve student focus, behavior, and academic outcomes.

Using ESA funds to cover the cost of school meals would benefit every student by still supporting their education choice.

Senate Bill 2295 undermines the principles of public education by diverting taxpayer dollars to schools that are not subject to the same public accountability. Rather than creating an inequitable funding structure that benefits a select few, I urge the Legislature to redirect these funds toward a universal meal program that serves **every** child in North Dakota, ensuring that no student goes hungry, regardless of where they receive their education.

I respectfully ask this committee to oppose SB 2295.

Thank you for your time and consideration.