

1 Testimony in Opposition to SB 2400 - Education Savings Account Program

2 *Mr. Aaron Loff, Principal/Activities Director, Fessenden-Bowdon Public Schools*

3 Good morning, Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee.

4 I would like to start off by thanking all members of the House and Senate for their continued
5 commitment to education in the State of North Dakota. The work we do as educators is often a
6 thankless endeavor, with the primary reward of seeing our graduates develop into productive
7 members of a society. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to be here today to express my
8 thoughts and the concerns of myself and many of my colleagues in education.

9 Whether our graduates choose to pursue post-secondary education, receive certification in a
10 trade, or move directly into the workforce, the efforts of our lawmakers and, especially, our
11 educators are brought to fruition. As the Principal of a North Dakota K-12 School, I have the
12 unique opportunity to work with students in every phase of their educational journey. The issues
13 that most districts in our state face, include lack of resources, shortage of teachers, and a
14 shortage of student support in social-emotional learning and mental health.

15 SB 2400 provides a disproportionate funding schedule between private and public school
16 students. The challenge that many families face in rural North Dakota is their proximity to
17 private school education. Freedom of choice is only a reality for those in our more urban areas,
18 where a vast majority of Private Schools are located. Section 1, Part 5 of SB2400 specifically
19 outlines the criteria for which public funds can be spent for non-public schools, which is the
20 primary reason I am opposing this bill.

21 Rural public schools in North Dakota are hurting. We are struggling yearly to provide the
22 staffing and support that our students need to thrive in today's world. Public schools are the
23 backbone of many of our communities, and the success of these schools can ultimately

1 determine the well-being of the community as a whole. Diverting public school funding
2 elsewhere jeopardizes the future of our schools and communities.

3 If this bill were to pass, what would the system of accountability look like for private schools? If
4 they are to receive public dollars to operate their private schools, shouldn't they be held to the
5 same rigorous standards of curriculum, testing, and financial management? Taking money
6 away from public schools would be a tremendous disservice to the over 127,000 students
7 enrolled in them.

8 As a father of 4 children, all of whom attend my school district, I understand that each student
9 has unique needs that need to be met in a variety of different ways. The challenge for all
10 schools, public and private, is finding the necessary resources to meet the needs of its students.
11 Utilizing public funds in private schools decreases the ability of public schools to meet the needs
12 of all learners.

13 The potential fallout from this bill could extend well beyond academics. Would public funding
14 going toward private schools have an impact on extracurricular activities? When schools have
15 no district boundaries, the pool of potential student-athletes they can pull from is unlimited.
16 This, along with the ability to control student enrollment, opens up the door to the creation of
17 "dream teams" that could dominate high school sports for years. The additional funding
18 received through this bill could easily help offset the costs of tuition, enabling schools to go after
19 the best talent our state has to offer all while meeting the enrollment requirements to stay in the
20 class of their choice.

21 In conclusion, I oppose this bill as a taxpayer, father, school principal, and activities director. SB
22 2400, and all of the potential fallout of its passing, is not good for public schools, students,
23 educators, or the hard-working North Dakotans who want to see their communities thrive and
24 countless graduates walk across the stages in our state each May.

1 Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you
2 may have.

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