

February 4, 2025

RE: SB 2295 & SB 2400

Public funds should support public schools, which serve all children regardless of background, ability, or beliefs. Redirecting taxpayer dollars to private schools weakens public education by diverting already limited resources, worsening teacher shortages, and increasing inequality—especially in rural areas where private school options are scarce and not everyone has the flexibility to home school.

Unlike public schools, private institutions can reject students based on disability, behavior, or religious beliefs, and they are not required to follow the same transparency, testing, or teaching licensing standards. Public funding for private schools primarily benefits wealthier families who can afford tuition beyond what vouchers cover, while leaving lower income students behind. Expecting taxpayers to fund private school tuition is like me asking for a handout to subsidize my country club membership. There are public greens maintained by taxpayer dollars, but our family wanted different amenities and have our personal reasons, so we chose a different option. Additionally, there are new hospital services in ND offering membership by a monthly subscription fee. I could choose to doctor there for personal reasons; I would not expect my subscription fee to be subsidized by taxpayer dollars because there are public health institutions that are required to see every patient that taxpayers already help maintain—a personal choice should not be subsidized with public money. Even if all of these “choices” were subsidized, they would still not be an option for the poorest children—who have no choice in this matter if it costs them anything.

Instead of diverting funds to exclusive institutions, we should focus on strengthening public schools by increasing teacher pay, improving curriculum, looking at stronger pre-k options for all children, and ensuring all students have access to the education they deserve. These are research based tactics that would improve outcomes. (I urge you to look at what was done in West Virginia in a bipartisan manner and the ensuing RESULTS.)

In reading through many of the testimony in support of this bill I couldn't help but notice arguments for including many hot button issues. This era of culture wars and politics is blinding us and making us worse off—there are meaningful paths forward based on data. What if someone wanted to open a private school just for transgender kids or a school just for atheists? If states fund private religious schools or other selective institutions with tax dollars, then these schools would also be eligible. This policy isn't about school choice, it's about picking ideological winners and losers with public money. Instead of opening the door to taxpayer-funded ideological battles, we should keep public money in public schools. Let's keep our Midwestern common sense.

North Dakota is already falling behind, I fear this legislation would make disparities and outcomes worse. I do believe there is room to improve the public education system in ND, and avenues for everyone's voice to be heard to come up with solutions, but leaving public schools behind is not the way to go about it. Please vote no on this bill.

Thank you for your consideration,

Daryl Kappenman