

Chairman Heinert and House Education Committee Members,

My name is Kimberly Efta, and I am a resident of District 42 in Grand Forks (zip code 58203). I am a full-time real estate agent, and my husband, Deven, is a farmer. We are grateful to call North Dakota home and are raising our three children, ages 9, 8, and 6, here.

I am submitting this testimony in support of all school choice bills, as I firmly believe North Dakota needs to enact policies that allow parents to make the best educational decisions for their children. On February 4, I provided oral testimony in support of SB 2295, and I appreciate the opportunity to continue advocating for this issue today.

Both my husband and I were educated in public schools and had wonderful experiences. In fact, my family has long supported school choice. When I was in second grade at Unity Elementary in Petersburg, my parents fought for open enrollment in North Dakota. To ensure my older sisters could participate in extracurricular activities, they made the difficult decision to move our family more than 20 miles to Larimore. They traveled to Bismarck 19 times during the 1993 legislative session to advocate for open enrollment, and their commitment to our education left a lasting impression on me.

Decades later, we are still debating whether parents should have the right to choose the best school for their children. As a parent, I find it deeply concerning that public school district boundaries dictate where my child must attend school based solely on our home address. The recent Grand Forks Public Schools boundary map changes will force some children to switch schools, regardless of what may be best for their individual needs or proximity to their current school.

As a real estate agent, I have already received calls from homeowners who feel they have no choice but to sell their homes and move—simply to keep their children in their current school. This is a costly and unnecessary burden that could be avoided with expanded school choice policies.

There are also clear disparities between schools in Grand Forks. The highest-performing elementary schools—Kelly, Discovery, and Century—are located in wealthier neighborhoods, where the average sold home price in the past year was \$494,272. Meanwhile, in the north Grand Forks neighborhoods of the 58203 zip code, the average sold home price is \$226,693, and our assigned elementary school ranks 8th out of 11 in the district. Families should not have to buy a half-million-dollar home just to access a top-performing public school.

It is a complete misconception that only wealthy families choose private education. The reality is that many middle- and lower-income families also seek alternatives, but their options are limited. The current system creates an inequitable divide, where the wealthiest families have access to the best schools while lower-income families are left with fewer opportunities. No parent should be forced to uproot their family due to a school district's redrawn boundaries.

One example of an alternative option serving families of all socioeconomic backgrounds is St. Michael's School, a historic school in downtown Grand Forks, located in District 18—one of the state's lowest-income areas. The school building, over 100 years old, features classic early 20th-century architecture, a four-story brick exterior, and a creaking wooden staircase. The playground is a blacktop parking lot, yet despite its lack of a sprawling campus, St. Michael's provides a strong education and serves as a testament to the lasting importance of school choice in shaping communities.

I urge you to support school choice policies in North Dakota to ensure that all families—regardless of income or address—have access to the best possible education for their children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kimberly Efta

District 42 Resident, Grand Forks, ND