

*Complaining about a problem
without proposing a solution
is called whining.
-Teddy Roosevelt*



Bette B. Grande
President & CEO

Bette Grande, CEO, Roughrider Policy Center testimony in favor of SB 2288.

Chairman Bell and members of the Senate Finance and Taxation Committee,

This Tax-credit scholarship policy will empower parents to choose the learning environment that best meets the individual needs of their children. There are few greater roles for parents than the education of their children.

Events over the past year put enormous pressure on students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Parents, especially those with limited means, do not have the ability to choose the best academic environment for their children. This Bill empowers parents and meets the needs of students.

This Bill provides an incentive for taxpayers to make contributions to nonprofit scholarship granting organizations that provide the resources to families to make the best decisions for their children.

Today there are 24 tax-credit scholarship policies in 19 states because they are popular with parents and the public, and because they empower students to find the learning environment that fits them best.

These policies are also popular because they provide a net positive fiscal impact to state budgets. As you know, the Legislature faces serious budget issues for next biennium and this Bill provides significant savings to the state.

The Bill provides a tax credit to the taxpayer who makes a contribution to a non-profit scholarship granting organization. For each scholarship recipient who chooses to attend a private school that provides the education they seek, the state aid that would otherwise be earmarked and expended for that student is retained by the state to fund other priorities.

Furthermore, this should balance out some of the pressure on local school districts to build new facilities, reduce some classroom sizes, lessening the load on teachers. All while providing parents and students the freedom and resources to choose the educational environment the fits their needs Finally this can provide a better allocation of resources and a savings to property taxpayers.

This Bill is not prohibited by the ND Constitution nor does it undermine the State's obligation to provide a public school system as stated in our Constitution.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2020 (*Espinoza v Montana Department of Revenue*) that the "Blaine Amendment" provision in Montana's Constitution is unconstitutional under the U.S. Constitution. This case related to a tax credit scholarship policy, similar to SB 2288, that was enacted in 2015. This Supreme Court ruling applies to North Dakota as well, and the Blaine Amendment provision to our Constitution no longer prohibits this Bill.

Summary

We are just starting to realize the impact on students and our educational system from COVID-19. We should learn from this tragic experience and seek ways to better meet the needs of students. North Dakota has waited too long to offer Education choice to families and it is time to Empower parents in meeting the educational needs of their children all while benefiting the entire state.