

January 31, 2023

Dear Chairman Elkin and the members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Nicholas Scotten. I spent thirty years in education, with the majority of them in administration of primary and secondary schools. I am currently a pastor, while being on the board of a new school (Valley City Christian School) that we are seeking to establish in Valley City this Fall.

I write to you in **support of HB 1532** for the following reasons:

1. The state constitution does not disallow for state support of “sectarian” schools, as long as money raised to support public schools is not used to support sectarian schools. Article 8.5 of the ND Constitution reads: “No money raised for the support of the public schools of the state shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school.”
2. The state constitution further solidifies public schools’ standing as an institution that will always be supported, except with an act by the State and Federal governments, so chances are public schools will get their funding. They may get less funding if they have fewer students, but that certainly sounds reasonable, as well. After all, private schools also get less funding when they have fewer students.
3. The time has come for our state to match many other states regarding freedom of choice. While there is technically freedom of choice in ND, the poor and middle class are often priced out of having choice, and have to choose public education. Sadly, it is not the choice they want to make, but they have to. Arizona and Iowa have universal school choice, letting \$7,000 or more follow the student if they decide to use a private school. Notice, it only goes to the student or the school if the family chooses that school, so the state is not directly funding the school, except to fulfill its commitment to its citizens, whose choices are being honored.
4. What we need in ND is true competition. What we have right now is something like an ability to go to McDonalds for a Big Mac or Burger King for a Whopper. Let’s say you like the Whopper much better, but you have to pay \$20 for the Whopper, but the Big Mac is free (make that tax-payer funded). Which one would you pick? Probably the Big Mac—not what you wanted, but something a lot more doable for your wallet, especially if a family of four would cost \$80, plus tax! We need money to follow the child, and parents need to put their children wherever they want, instead of where they can afford.
5. The public schools are unacceptable to a growing number of parents because:
 - a. They are underperforming terribly. Private schools of all stripes outperform them by a great deal academically, even when special needs students are taken out of the equation.

- b. Public schools don't provide religious instruction that many parents want. Religious parents often want not only straight Bible/religion courses, but also a biblical worldview infused in every course that is taught.
- c. Many parents are rightly concerned about which educators might be pushing a CRT or LGBTQ agenda.
- d. Behavior, language, and attitudes among public school students (what many students come with and what is also tolerated) is quite toxic compared with what well-ordered families are seeking to normalize for their children.
- e. Curriculum is often watered down, lacking intellectual rigor, and missing the great works/classics of Western Civilization.

I ask that you consider (though I understand that there are probably good reasons why you wrote this bill the way you did):

1. Is it feasible to offer more money? North Dakotans are ready to exercise freedoms that they haven't been able to use because of lack of opportunity, so let's give at least \$5,000 a year. That way, a significant dent in private school tuition is made, so lower income families can be able to scrape together the rest. That would still be at least \$2,000 less than two other states who are offering it to every single student in the state.
2. With that higher amount per year, could there be more than \$24 million in the budget for it?
3. Could it start this coming Fall, 2023, instead of another year afterward?

Thank you to the representatives and senators who have sponsored this bill for the educational freedom from the shackles of mediocrity that happens when there is basically a monopoly on any given service. When you remove the financial barriers to lower and middle income citizens, so they truly have educational choice, then true competition will take place, and all schools will have to up their game or get off the field!

Respectfully submitted,

Nicholas Scotten, DEdMin