

Chairman Heinert and members of the committee,

My name is John Odermann and my wife, Jessica and I currently reside in Dickinson, ND with our three children. I write today in support of HB1532. My wife and I are products of the state's private schools, her a graduate of St. Mary's Central High School in Bismarck, and myself a graduate of Trinity High School in Dickinson. We plan for our children to attend private school as well.

Education, and the value of it, is something that was instilled in me at an early age. My paternal grandmother, Helen Odermann, was a school teacher in Elbowoods, ND, which as you likely know, is now located under Lake Sakakawea. She continued her career as a much beloved school teacher for many years in Billings County. I remember her once saying, "Education is a goal in of itself, but also the means by which we can achieve all others."

She was a wise woman. She was a public school teacher, but she also saw the value in private, faith-based schooling and sent her children to school at Assumption Abbey prep and New England St. Mary's. My father, James, was an Abbey Cub and my mother Leona was a Trinity Titan, a member of the first graduating class in 1965. The die for my eight siblings and I, as they say, had been cast long before we were earth side, we were likely going to a private Catholic school. But that doesn't mean the road to that education was short or easy.

Over the course of 15-20 years my parents worked very hard to provide that education for us. We lived on the family ranch north of Belfield and would drive 60 miles round trip to and from school in Dickinson. We've done the math and I would argue we put anywhere between 250,000-500,000 miles on family cars in those years to make that education happen. The odometers would agree, and so would the bank balance. Money was tight on a regular basis, we wore out tires, and cars. Financially it was a hardship, but it was also a choice. A choice my parents would say was worth it, one they would make again.

It's a choice other parents would like to make for their children, but are not able to make it make sense financially.

HB1532 would go a long way to helping it make sense financially for those families who dutifully pay their property taxes each year and would have liked to have their child be able to continue to attend school in person during the COVID pandemic, but could not afford it. For a parent that would like to have their Christian faith supported by their children's teachers on a daily basis and have it integrated into the curriculum, but cannot afford it. Or the parent that would like to see their children in a classroom with a lower teacher-to-student ratio, but cannot afford it.

At its core that's what this bill comes down to. Choice. Being able to choose a school that reflects your values and helps undergird what you are trying to teach at home in a faith-based setting, without having it create an undue financial hardship for families.

Our state's private schools have proven over the past century that they are not here to replace public education, they are a supplemental partner in educating our children, which have long been North Dakota's most valuable resource. The savings provided for school districts through the very existence of private schools is staggering when you take a moment to consider their sizeable impact.

Currently, the state's private schools with their, give or take, 8,000 students save the state of North Dakota and local school districts around \$80 million dollars each year educating those students. In Dickinson alone our 777 students in private school, according to the North Dakota Department of Public Instructions enrollment numbers save between \$7.5-\$8 million for the school district and state depending on what you place the cost per student at. Not to mention the savings on the infrastructure that would be needed to educate those children. The dollars add up fast. It's a valuable partnership that has worked for education in this state for a long time. We should work to continue this partnership by supporting parents who chose to entrust their children to the private schools.

It makes financial sense for the parents who make that choice.

It also makes financial sense for the state of North Dakota.

I urge you to support and give a "do pass" designation to HB1532, it will enable more parents to take the responsibility of making what they determine is the best decision for their children's education.