

House Bill 1532

House Education Hearing

Wednesday, February 1st, 2023

Written Testimony in Favor of House Bill 1532

Chairman Heinert, Vice-Chairwoman Schreiber-Beck, and all members of the House Education Committee; my name is Katie Kost and my children are in 2nd and 4th grade at Bismarck's Shiloh Christian School.

I am in favor of House Bill 1532 that would appropriate money from the state treasury general fund to the department of public instruction in order to establish an educational reimbursement program for non-public schools.

Support for this bill is support for parent choice, support for having options with education. Just as consumers have options for almost every service - we get to choose our doctors, our mechanics, which grocery store we go to - having a choice in our children's education is important. It may be one of the most important decisions we make in our children's lives.

Our daughter started school in the fall of 2018 and our son was set to start kindergarten in the fall of 2020. However, in the spring of 2020 as we were all trying to navigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found out our transfer request to keep our kids at the school they had been attending the past 2 years was denied.

We knew, as transfer students, there would always be the possibility of having to move schools at some point. What we could not have predicted was that it would happen in the middle of an incredibly uncertain time.

Given the situation of having to switch schools in the middle of a pandemic, we began looking into other options. Fortunately, we were able to consider a private school and the benefits of smaller class sizes were very appealing when quarantining was a very real thing.

We made the switch and our kids started at Shiloh in the fall of 2020. I knew it was the right decision for us at the time and I was incredibly grateful it was an option for us. What I did not know at the time, is how much our kids would thrive at Shiloh.

Fast forward, 2.5 years and we are still there. While this testimony could quickly turn into an advertisement for Shiloh - as I could list all the things that make our school wonderful, I want to focus on what it means to have education options.

Bismarck/Mandan, and I'm sure most of our state, has an amazing public school system and a strong public school system contributes to a strong community. But what also keeps a community strong, is when parents have options to find the school that best fits their kids' and their family's needs.

For our family, it was discovering a school that better supported our daughter's reserved personality. She has absolutely thrived in the smaller class settings. Prior to our transition to Shiloh, school was a source of anxiety for our daughter.

It was finding a support system - not just a school - that aligned with our family's faith. It's been incredible to watch our kids navigate challenges and situations where their faith gets to be a part of the conversation - something that is important to us.

I know our kids would be successful in any school they attend - they are resilient and strong learners. However, I am not sure they would thrive at another school like they do at Shiloh.

Again, it comes down to having the option and giving parents the opportunity to explore what is best for their children.

Up to this point and for our family, we've been incredibly fortunate. At my father-in-law's urging, we've been contributing to our kids' 529 funds for years and we've been able to use those funds for tuition.

But each spring as we look towards the next school year, we have to have the conversation about how we will continue to make this work. Private education tuition is a huge financial commitment that comes at the expense of something else.

But it goes beyond us. There have been many instances in talking with other parents where their son or daughter is struggling to find their place or way in school and the parents feel stuck. They can't even consider another option because of the cost of tuition. Or a parent expresses the desire for Christian education but can't even consider it because of the cost of tuition.

While public school isn't necessarily the best option for some, neither is private school; but cost shouldn't be the determining factor.

A reimbursement program would assist North Dakota's private schools in keeping tuition costs down. This keeps school options open and accessible to families in our community. It strengthens parent choice in education. It keeps our communities viable and attractive to families. This is why I support House Bill 1532.

Thank you for allowing all of me the opportunity to share our experiences and my position on this bill.

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