

Chairman and Committee Members:

I urge a no vote on HB 1532 which would give \$24 million to parents to reimburse between 15 and 30% of tuition costs. I understand that parents want the best education for the children; my children went to both Catholic and public schools at different times in their educational journey. However, I was always willing to pay both public school taxes and private tuition. I also was happy to help fundraise for scholarships, recognizing that not all families were able to afford tuition. I consider public schools to be like public roads: I may not use them all but I understand they are necessary for a functioning community.

Diverting 24 million dollars of the public tax money to private schools is money that could go to support public school students. No one can argue that COVID has been a strain on kids, students, teachers, families in general. In Valley City, mental health counselors in schools are paid for by private donations and teachers are still buying classroom supplies. Could that 24 million go to feeding kids breakfast so everyone is ready to teach and learn, or to School Resource Officers in smaller communities so our kids are safe or a fund to ensure that the presence of school counselors is assured or measures that improve teacher recruitment and retention or better teacher/student ratio or gifted programs or extra resources for STEAM or technical internships? This list goes on. The principal is to make public education better, not gut it.

Public education is for everyone. Rural communities often have no other option. In the over 100 testimonies posted, I count only a handful from small districts. Private schools can pick and choose their students- the public schools must take kids with special needs of all kinds. This tax supported voucher program comes with minimal strings attached- only that the student attend a "qualified school", definition not specified.

Most of the private schools are religious in nature. Use of general fund for the voucher system is an obvious maneuver to avoid school taxes from going to sectarian schools as is prohibited in the Century Code. I think the spirit of the law is clear, though: public money should not be used to advance any particular religious agenda. Many of the original immigrants from Europe fled religious persecution and the Founding Fathers wanted to avoid the religious warfare that had plagued the Old World for centuries. Non-sectarian schools are necessary for our kids to learn in an open, tolerant environment. While parents are and churches can be major forces in a child's character, ethical, caring, respectful behavior can and should be taught in a non-religious environment.