

Good Morning Chairman Sorvaag and Committee Members,

I am Marie Vetter of Grand Forks, District 18. My husband Tim and I have 10 children. Tim is a Federal Agent in Public Service, and I work part-time. We have run the gamut of educational experiences including public, homeschool, and non-public settings in search of what we consider to be the ideal balance of environment, content, and transparency. It is to our credit, if I may say so, that we held out for as long as we did in public education, ever hopeful, the long-length of which was entirely due to wonderful educators who tried valiantly to make up for what was lacking in environment and transparency of the institution itself. We forayed briefly into home education, where I acquired a sudden and deepened respect for professional educators; and now, finally, we have settled into non-public education, and it is here where we have found our home. We will never go back to public education since discovering the level of integrity, dedication to the fostering of virtue, the height of academic rigor, and above all, the partnership we feel as respected primary-educators of our children that we have found in non-public education.

We're all here today because we know private education comes at a cost. We're here to decide who is responsible for that cost. We know that parents are free to choose non-public education, but that that education is not free. For my family, we are so convinced our children are in the best possible learning environment for their needs, we make whatever financial sacrifice necessary to be able to pay tuition. Even after accepting financial assistance, we sacrifice by forgoing a large house, new cars, vacations of almost any sort, most extracurriculars, and we buy what we can second-hand before buying new in order to prioritize the learning environment our children are in.

We understand that we have entered into this choice electively. My husband and I are not new to elective choices: my husband as a current public servant and former US Paratrooper; myself as a former military spouse, losing my first husband in mind, following multiple traumatic deployments, and later, finally, in body, by, as described on his death certificate, a "single gunshot wound to the head": Veteran Suicide. Electively serving our Nation may cost you your very life, widow your spouse, and orphan your children, and it is unjust that in return it will offer you only one choice for educating your children. Let's be just. Families are not asking for a free ride, or that anything be taken from those that benefit from public education. We're simply asking for a gesture that recognizes parents as the first and best advocates for the needs of their children. A tax credit that allows us to recoup even some of the costs of what we contribute to public education through what we pay in taxes, yet do not utilize, is absolutely just.

Please pass HB 1532 and let North Dakota join the new era of a nation that makes school choice possible for all, without undue hardship.

Thank you for your service to the state of North Dakota and for your time on this bill.