

Good Morning, Chairman Elkin, Vice Chairman Beard and Committee Members.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you about HB 1532.

My name is Kimberly Efta of Grand Forks and a District 42 resident. I am a full-time Realtor and my husband, Deven, is a farmer. We are so grateful to be living in North Dakota. We have three kids, ages 7, 6, and 4. I grew up on a family farm near Petersburg, ND, and attended Lutheran Church my entire life. My husband and I were both public-school educated and had wonderful experiences.

I believe this bill is about a generational change, so I would like to give a little background of my education growing up. When I was in 2nd grade in 1993 at Unity Elementary School in Petersburg, my parents fought for open enrollment in North Dakota. For my older sisters to qualify for extra-curricular activities my parents made the decision to move the entire family to Larimore, more than 20 miles away. Even though I was young I remember my parents were certainly concerned about our education. They traveled to Bismarck 19 times during the 1993 legislative session in support of open enrollment. Here we are with another generational change bill with HB 1532.

Eight years ago, when my husband and I moved to Grand Forks to start our careers, we looked for months to find a home where we could raise a family. During our home search the number one item on our list was proximity to an elementary school. We found the perfect home. It's located adjacent to an elementary school near the UND campus. Our backyard gate opens to the school playground. We didn't even purchase a swing set for our yard because the school playground is so close. Attending public school was our first choice in our kids' education. When my oldest was old enough to attend public school, we registered her for Grand Forks Public Schools. She was so excited to be going to school right next door. In August 2021 she attended a month-long Intro to Kindergarten class at that school. The convenience of walking her to the school from our house was so nice and I think she told the entire teaching staff where our home was located.

However, due to the worldwide pandemic, the world had begun to shift. Seemingly everything turned political: from social issues, masking, American history, to our cherished American traditions. It was during this very heated political climate in our world that my husband and I had a long discussion about where our she would begin her educational journey. We knew we had a parental duty and choice to see our kids raised in an environment that shared our beliefs and philosophies. That is when I reached out to St. Michael's, five days before the start of our oldest child's kindergarten year. I am a Lutheran and chose to send my kids to a non-public Catholic school. This certainly was not an easy decision. My husband and I had many discussions about finances, transportation to and from school, and after school care. We are paying for our children's education with financial assistance from St. Michael's, their grandparents and personal finances. I know there are parents and caregivers who cannot afford non-public schools. Supporting HB 1532 would provide them the opportunity to choose where their children are educated.

One of the most important things we have learned about raising children? It is impossible to go back to square one and restart their educational journey. You get one chance to raise your kids – that's it – one chance. We are making the choice to get them a solid foundation in their Christian faith. Now that our middle child was old enough to start school this year, we had the same discussion as when we sent our oldest to St. Michael's. It was an easier decision for us since watching our oldest child flourish at St. Michael's.

Here we are 30 years later from the open enrollment bill to pass a much-needed change in the education system. It's time for parental choice in their kids' education from now on. On behalf of so many families who support school choice, we would deeply appreciate your support for HB 1532.

Thank you for your time and consideration.