

HB 1532 Testimony

Chairman Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee, for the record my name is Brandt Dick, and I am here to speak in opposition to HB 1532 and to talk about choice.

Private schools in ND admit a select few special education students. When I was an administrator at Shiloh, I remember talking with a parent who wanted their child to attend Shiloh, but their child had needs that would require many services. Shiloh had very few services that were provided, so I politely told the parent Shiloh was not going to be a good fit for that child—a reality for many parents of special education children when they try to enroll their children in private schools.

During my run for State Superintendent, I sought the endorsement from Family Policy Alliance of ND. One of the questions they asked when determining if they were going to endorse me is what I thought about vouchers and education savings accounts. I shared that I did not believe that state taxpayer money should be used to fund private schools unless all parents had choice to send their children to private schools. If a voucher bill or savings account bill would be available to all students, then I would be in favor of them. This stance cost me the endorsement of Family Policy Alliance, and HB 1532 does nothing to assure that this program would be for all students, specifically special needs children.

Why did my viewpoint change from making the easy choice to say no as administrator of Shiloh to my current viewpoint?

In late 2019, my nephew and his wife were excited to hear that they would be expecting their first child. During the pregnancy, it was discovered that their child would have major medical issues. Twice during this pregnancy, their doctors recommended to my nephew and his wife that they should abort the baby as it would be a hardship for them to raise this child. My nephew and his wife firmly believed that God had created the life that was being formed, and they believed that God would grant them what they needed to raise this child. My great niece was born the summer of 2020. As the doctors had predicted, she has major medical issues, and even today, she requires a nurse's care for many hours every day.

Now that my great niece is approaching her 3rd birthday, the public school in the community where they live has reached out to them to start the process of providing the services she will need for her education. My nephew and his wife will not have the choice to send their daughter to a private school. HB 1532 does nothing to address this reality for many families in ND. Many supporters of this bill are supporters are also pro-life. I hope the state of ND does more to realize that being pro-life also includes caring for all children's education, including the education of special education students. Here is the reality that public schools do a much better job of educating all children. Many public schools in ND provide opportunities for students to be blessed by the interaction and the lessons learned from working with students with special needs, like inclusive sports.

Many of these children that have special needs are those that I feel that Jesus meant when He said in Matthew 25:40, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Also, Luke 14:13-14a shares a promise, "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed." I feel ND should and can do better for all parents than HB 1532 does. Parent rights should not be left at the door of a Private School if you have a high needs student like my great niece. Choose to vote No on HB 1532.