

I am writing to you today to ask that you recommend a "DO PASS" on HB 1532.

As parents, it is primarily our responsibility to educate our children. In this day and age, that includes choosing the best environment in which for them to be educated.

When we moved to Minot in 2005, we fully intended to enroll our children in the public school system. However, when we looked at the Minot Public School (MPS) system and realized how large the schools and class sizes were, we were concerned. Based on our prior experience with large school systems and being aware of our children's strengths and weaknesses, we chose to enroll them at Bishop Ryan Catholic School (BRCS). Our primary reasons for doing so were the smaller school and class sizes. We felt that our children would be best served by a school small enough where they could be seen and treated as individuals rather than as just one of many. Furthermore, as parents, we desired to be part of a school community where we could more easily be involved in volunteerism and decision-making in regard to the school curriculum and environment.

Time has proven that this was the right choice for our children. They have excelled in an environment where the teachers have the time to both challenge them as well as recognize and address their weaknesses. One of our children has diagnoses that may have qualified him for an IEP in the public school system, but that was unnecessary at BRCS; with very little advocating by us, his teachers met him where he was at, providing the accommodations he needed. Our youngest child currently at BRCS has a 504. The teachers and staff are again, very aware of and accommodating of his needs.

Choosing to enroll our children in a private school came with a huge financial burden. While we have received some small scholarships from BRCS through the generosity of benefactors, to find the funds to pay tuition required great sacrifices. For the first several years, our income was low enough that we qualified for WIC and other assistance. We have had to save money wherever possible, from shopping sales for food, only buying clothes at garage sales and thrift stores, driving older vehicles, working multiple jobs, and not taking family trips out of state.

While this was the choice we made for the benefit of our children, it has never seemed right that while we have struggled and sacrificed to find the money to pay school tuition, we also have been supporting the education of other people's children in MPS through our tax dollars. By sending our children to a private school for the past eighteen years we have saved the state of ND hundreds of thousands of dollars while getting no return, no benefit, from the "investment" of our tax dollars in the public school system. We have stayed in ND to live and work largely because of the excellent school environment at BRCS. Our children who have graduated from college so far have all stayed to work in ND and own homes. So, while our family continues to contribute to our state's economy, when it comes to education, the ledger is out of balance. HB 1532 would, in a very small way, help to right that inequity.

HB 1532 will not take anything away from the public school system. It will be funded through a separate appropriation, will be overseen by the ND Department of Public Instruction, will be capped at a set amount, and will only reimburse parents 30% of the tuition they pay. Yet, even that small amount might be enough to allow more parents like us to truly choose the best educational setting for their children, based on their needs, not just their finances.

Thank you,

Mary and Jeremy Finley

