

To Whom it May Concern-

I am writing this testimony in opposition to HB 1532. I am a school-based occupational therapist working for South East Education Cooperative. I provide services to six rural school districts in southeast North Dakota as well as a special education preschool. The information I am reading about providing funding to private schools versus public schools is alarming. As someone who serves children of all backgrounds and abilities in various school districts, I see firsthand the issues facing children in our state today. This includes emotional regulation issues, mental health concerns, and behavioral problems. With these issues, many resources and services are warranted. When a child with these issues comes to a school I serve (all public schools), there is not an option whether to serve them or not. It is required: even with staffing shortages, limited resources, etc. They must be taken care of, as they should be. Taking away funding to assist with these issues from public schools and giving it to private schools is outrageous. These private schools are not, nor ever will be an option for students in rural areas.

As a taxpayer in the community I work, and as a mother of two young children, one of who will start in the public school system next year, it is infuriating to think that local taxpayer money will be given to private schools who already have an abundance of resources, especially with no accountability for how it is used. The majority of students who attend private schools have families who are more financially sound and can afford to send them to a private school in the first place. I see everyday students who come to school without proper footwear, winter wear, and nutrition. Public schools try to fill in these gaps as best they can. However, if funding is decreased, not only can they not meet their educational needs, but will struggle to help meet these basic human needs for these students. These kids are our future, and early intervention is crucial. Please do not take this money away from public schools who are doing everything in their power to help kids succeed.