

March 13, 2023

RE: Testimony HB 1532

Chairman Elkin and Members of the Education Committee

I am writing to express my opposition to HB 1532. My education was mixed with both rural Catholic and rural public institutions. I am grateful for all three of these schools and the education I received. I am also a parent of three children, all of whom are educated in our rural public schools. I have served on our district's school board. I am also a property tax payer. These all play a role in my opposition to this bill.

I hold dear my faith and can appreciate private religious schools. However, since the nearest private Catholic schools are located 40 miles away, for us this has not been a practical option for educating our children.

There are parents who do choose private schools to educate their children. It is a choice in lieu of a public, taxpayer-funded education. Not everyone has that option readily available to them, so this really is not a bill of "school choice" for all students in the big picture. Furthermore:

1. This bill is unconstitutional. The ND Constitution clearly states that no taxpayer dollars levied for funding public education shall be given to or used to support any sectarian school. How is this voucher bill not in defiance of our state's constitution?
2. This bill does not create more funding from which to pull. This bill takes funding out of the pockets of the schools these taxpayer dollars are supposed to be directed to. If we feel public schools are failing, how can we fix them with less funding? We should focus on fully funding and improving the public school system, not funneling funds to private institutions.
3. Public schools serve all students. They are required to do so. Private schools take students upon application. They are not required to admit all who apply. The voucher program does not take this into consideration.
4. Public schools have to show where their dollars are spent. They are accountable to the taxpayer. If the legislature wishes to give taxpayer dollars through a voucher program to private school students, where is the transparency and accountability for these public dollars? Where are the rules to follow to show how the money is spent? Who qualifies for the money? If private schools want money from levied taxes, they should have to follow the same rules of financial transparency.
5. If the communities with private schools wish to fund them as they fund their public institutions, then that community should vote to levy funds for those schools. This bill would be taking public dollars that should come back to my school district and giving them to schools not even in my community.
6. If my house does not burn down this year, does that mean I get my fire district tax dollars refunded to me? Parents are given the opportunity to utilize a free public education system. They are free to choose other options if they wish and should be responsible for the expense to do so. It is still a duty as taxpayers to educate the majority of our future citizens, something all of us will benefit from.

DO NOT PASS HB 1532!

Respectfully,
Julie Reis, Fairfield ND