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HB 1472

Testimony of Amy De Kok House Education Committee February 4, 2025

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Amy De Kok, and I serve as the executive director for the North Dakota School Boards Association. I am here to express opposition to HB 1472, which seeks to authorize microschools in North Dakota. While expanding educational options is an important goal, this bill raises significant concerns regarding educational quality, equity, accountability, and student safety.

Lack of Accountability and Oversight

HB 1472 exempts microschools from essential state laws and regulations that ensure the quality and safety of educational institutions. The bill explicitly exempts microschools from teacher certification requirements, criminal history record checks, and compliance with health and safety codes. This lack of oversight raises serious concerns about the quality of instruction and the safety of students attending these institutions. Unlike public and private schools, which must meet rigorous educational and operational standards, microschools would operate with little to no regulatory oversight.

Potential for Educational Inequities

Public education is designed to provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of background or economic status. However, by allowing microschools to charge tuition and operate without clear financial assistance mechanisms, HB 1472 could create additional disparities in educational access. Families with fewer financial resources may be unable to afford high-quality microschool options, while wealthier families benefit from alternative, potentially higher-quality learning environments. This will deepen the existing educational divide, disproportionately harming students from low-income and historically underserved communities.

Concerns About Student Outcomes and Assessment Gaps

Although the bill requires microschool students to take assessments in grades four, six, eight, and ten, these standards are far weaker than those required for traditional public schools. There is no requirement for certified educators, structured curricula, or adherence to state-approved academic

benchmarks. Without adequate oversight of instructional quality, there is no guarantee that students in microschoools will receive a comprehensive, well-rounded education that adequately prepares them for higher education or the workforce.

Weak Standards for Educators

One of the most alarming provisions of HB 1472 is that teachers in microschoools are only required to have a high school diploma or equivalent. This is a stark departure from the professional training and certification required of public school educators. Teaching is a profession that requires expertise in instructional methods, classroom management, and child development. Allowing individuals without formal training to educate children undermines the integrity of North Dakota's education system and places students at risk of receiving subpar instruction.

Undermining North Dakota's Home Education Laws

North Dakota has long upheld strong home education laws that ensure parents take direct responsibility for their child's education, requiring supervision and compliance with clear guidelines. HB 1472 introduces a parallel system that weakens these standards by allowing microschoools to operate without the same parental oversight that home educators must adhere to.

Under existing home education laws, parents must file a notice of intent, ensure instruction is provided by a parent or qualified individual, and maintain academic records. In contrast, microschoools would allow entrepreneurs or non-parental figures to assume educational roles without the same legal responsibilities. This opens the door for the commercialization of homeschooling under a loosely regulated structure, ultimately diluting the integrity of home education laws and diminishing parental control over their child's learning environment.

Health, Safety, and Disability Rights Concerns

HB 1472 exempts microschoools from critical health, fire, and building code regulations, which exist to ensure safe learning environments. This lack of regulation puts students at risk, especially in settings that do not meet basic safety standards. Additionally, the bill does not provide clear guidelines for ensuring compliance with federal and state disability laws. Students with disabilities could face barriers to accessing necessary accommodations, further exacerbating educational inequities.

Undermining Public Education

Public schools are the backbone of our education system, serving all students and fostering community cohesion. By diverting students and potentially public funding away from traditional schools, HB 1472 threatens the stability and effectiveness of public education. Instead of creating parallel,

unregulated alternatives, we should focus on strengthening existing schools, investing in teacher development, and addressing the challenges that public schools face.

While educational innovation and flexibility are important, HB 1472 introduces more risks than benefits. By eliminating crucial oversight, weakening educator standards, undermining home education laws, and failing to address equity concerns, this bill compromises the integrity of North Dakota's education system. I urge the committee to oppose this bill and instead seek solutions that enhance, rather than weaken, educational quality and equity for all students in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.