

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

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Support and Amendment Request for SB 2351

Good afternoon, Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Blaine Anderson; I am a private ND resident in Rural Cass County. I support Senate Bill 2351 and request an additional amendment to further improve the annexation process in North Dakota.

The proposed language as written seems to be a commonsense solution to ensure property owners are notified of any potential changes to the jurisdictions governing their property. Additionally, I would request the committee consider an amendment and add an emergency clause that expands the potential for voluntary land swaps between school districts, addressing a crucial limitation currently hindering collaboration between public school districts.

My family's story: My wife and I have two children Hayden (6<sup>th</sup> grade) and Briggs (3<sup>rd</sup> grade). We moved from West Fargo to Rural Cass County over 10 years ago in hopes of raising a family in a rural setting like we grew up in. (Both me and my wife graduated in 2000 from Litchville-Marion High School in Marion, ND) It came as a surprise that we were not in the Mapleton School district when our children were of school age. Mapleton accepted our children through open enrollment, and both have been there from kindergarten until present time.

Our family is very active in the Mapleton community and School. We are committed to making the fast-growing community better through volunteering on boards and offering assistance when needed.

I have been working for the past 18 months on getting my kids in the Mapleton School District from West Fargo. (Mapleton School only goes through 6<sup>th</sup> grade then kids go Central Cass for the remainder of their middle/High School years) Open Enrollment was shut down at Central Cass, so that option was closed. Then I looked at a land swap, but found that is it **impossible to get within the \$1000 existing Statutory cap**. I pulled every property tax along the two school districts and could not come close and then is when I even tried to combine parcels to get within range. Keep in mind that our home is a very average home for the area too.

The last option I have is annexation, and that has been on the county commission meeting twice now. **All sides have been gracious and want what is best for the children, but the \$1000 cap is a dated figure that must be changed for the next family going through this process.**

As a private citizen in Cass County, I have seen firsthand the challenges faced by neighboring school districts eager to engage in mutually beneficial land swaps but constrained by the existing statutory cap of \$1,000. Despite the willingness of both districts (West Fargo and Mapleton) to engage with my family hoping to permanently be moved into a different school district, suitable parcels to comply with the law to enable a voluntary land swap within the statutory value limit has proven elusive, thus stalling initiatives aimed at promoting school choice for families without adversely impacting the financial base of one district to the benefit of another.

Such an amendment enables school districts to better navigate their unique realities while fostering collaborative solutions that benefit all stakeholders. I respectfully urge your support for Bill 2351 with an additional amendment and emergency clause, helping willing parties work better together.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. I am also willing to speak via video conference or in person or later if needed.